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OUR 30TH ANNIVERSARY YEAR

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'Your artistry should be a question to your clients, not an answer. It is the same as the relationship between art and design. What I try to do is to make good questions. It's a never-ending challenge.'
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THE FRONT PORCH



The editor's custom Solomon Phidelity

ADAM PERLMUTTER

About ten years ago, Erich Solomon, a New Hampshire-based luthier I had met at the Montreal Guitar Show, said he'd like to make me an instrument. I had previously only owned production-model guitars, and though the idea was intriguing, I politely demurred, being averse to all the unknowns that would surely be involved. But because I had drooled over Solomon's creations on display at the show—and, admittedly, since they were much less expensive than others I'd been pining for—I eventually commissioned one of his 16-inch archtops.

Solomon took my order and scared up an exquisite set of tonewoods: deeply figured curly red maple for the one-piece back and the sides, and Adirondack spruce for the soundboard. The guitar, with its glistening French polish finish, eventually arrived, and it was even more splendid than I had hoped for. Though the Solomon now gets less play than the beat-up 1960s Gibson L-50 that sits on a stand next to my desk, it is a superior instrument in all aspects, and it's always a great pleasure to uncase it.

I've long thought that Solomon's work deserves far more attention than it gets—a guitarist no less than the late Walter Becker (of Steely Dan) once walked into Rudy's Music in New York and left with one of his prototypes. So I am delighted that Solomon is included in E.E. Bradman's feature on contemporary luthiers—Rachel Rosenkrantz, Kenny Hill, Michihiro Matsuda, Mónica Esparza, Randy Muth, Issac Jang, and Jayne Henderson—all celebrated as much for their fastidiousness as their inventiveness.

Elsewhere in this issue, Dick Boak, the Renaissance man and longtime C.F. Martin

employee, reviews *The Devil Is In It*, a lavishly packaged tome in which author John Stubbings tells his own wild story of commissioning a luthier-made instrument, while tracing the history of acoustic guitars in general. Boak, who contributed a feature on the Kingston Trio in the September/October 2019 issue, is an excellent writer, and I am thankful that he is taking time in his retirement years to contribute to the magazine.

In the last year or so, you might have noticed a greater number of songs in the magazine. I've enjoyed my role in creating the notation, which is how I got into the guitar-magazine business in the first place 20 years ago in New York. I was honored when David Lusterman recently asked me to succeed him as editor and will continue to have a hand in the songs and other notation in the magazine. My aim is to present music that showcases the broad expressive range of the acoustic guitar, whether classical studies ("Romanza"), classic instrumentals (Nick Lucas's "Picking the Guitar"), new works (Charlie Rauh's "Fanø" and "Black Sea Dress"), vintage R&B (Prince's "I Feel for You"), or folk-pop gems (John Denver's "Rocky Mountain High").

Speaking of John Denver, kudos to Jeffrey Pepper Rodgers for his lesson feature on the singer-songwriter. Jeff, AG's founding editor, always delivers incisive and engaging lessons—be sure to check out his other recent features, on Joan Baez, Bruce Cockburn, and others.

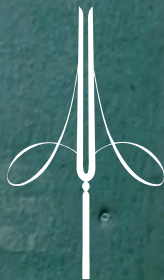
I look forward to serving you in this new capacity as editor—feel free to drop me a line anytime.

—Adam Perlmutter

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FEEDBACK

PRINT RULES

Thank you for your efforts in continuing to produce an ink-on-paper magazine. As a retired teacher, I prefer actual printed pages. It's what I'm most comfortable with. I don't like reading on the computer and despise it on a cellphone, so I buy the magazine proper. I can read it in the coffeeshop, in the loo (ha ha), and in bed during the evening. I can also plop it down on my Manhasset stand and learn a few new—or old—licks and songs.

I understand there's value to AG in presold

circulation, but I'm committed to supporting my local brick-and-mortar bookstore. So, I buy the magazine there and in so doing, I support two of my favorites with the same purchase. Thanks, and keep up the good work.

—Steve Manwarren, via email

BRITISH FINGERSTYLE

I saw John Renbourn play multiple times in the '90s, and must say that you neglected to mention he was a big fan of Franklin guitars, made by luthier Nick Kukich. John actually let me try his guitar after one of his performances

at the Bottom Line, in New York City. He and Bert [Jansch] are two of my biggest guitar idols. I'm glad I got to see Bert in Hartford, Connecticut, when he was touring with Pegi Young's band, not too long before he died. I miss the hell out of John and Bert.

—John Bono, via email

MOLLY TUTTLE LESSON

It's interesting to have an artist with Molly's abilities show and explain the various parts, pieces, and techniques. It shows the hours put in and the commitment to her craft that others can aspire to. Thanks for sharing.

—Mando Alire, via Facebook

Being talented is one thing (a voice to die for) but try explaining what you're doing while you're doing it, so an average player can understand . . . Wow.

—Gordon MacDiarmid, via Facebook

When I want to feel frustrated and hate myself, I try to flatpick with a floating right hand like Molly. She is pretty amazing.

—Steve Simmons, via Facebook

AN UNFORTUNATE COINCIDENCE

Some individuals have expressed concern regarding Schertler's recent ad, in which a guitarist's hand position is suggestive of a racist symbol. At Schertler, our work is based on passion and music, with the purpose of sharing and unifying people. We want to assure our customers and AG's readers that there was no meaning behind this; it was simply an unfortunate coincidence. The photo will be replaced in all future ads, and we offer our sincerest apologies to anyone who took offense.

—Dave Schmidt, National Sales Manager,
Schertler SA



TOP 30

As 2020 is AG's 30th anniversary year, we thought it would be fun to ask a one-question survey in each of the next several issues and share the top responses. Let's kick things off: **If you could own any guitar in the world—new or vintage, stock or custom—what would it be?** Send your responses by February 15 to Editors.AG@Stringletter.com and look for the results in the next issue.

CORRECTION

In the January/February 2020 issue, on page 83, the photograph of Stephan Connor should have been credited to Richard Duby.

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GUITAR TALK



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Youthful Explorations

French guitarist Antoine Boyer is a master of many styles

BY KATE KOENIG

Some of us discover our passion at a young age, but relatively few realize an intense motivation to act on it. When that age happens to be around six years old, and that motivation is not only realized with perfect clarity but guided into open avenues, it yields the golden intersection of events that lead to a guitar player like 23-year-old Antoine Boyer.

Boyer grew up in a Paris suburb, where his musical education began with the Gypsy jazz his parents would play around the house. When he was six years old, his father decided that he wanted to learn Gypsy guitar and brought his son along to lessons with him. They began at the same time, studying under Mandino Reinhardt. Later, they met Francis-Alfred Moerman, with whom they recorded an album, *L'Univers Insolite de Francis Moerman (The Unusual*

Universe of Francis Moerman), in 2009, when Antoine was just nine years old.

It's impossible to talk about Boyer without mentioning that marvelous mixture of youth and seemingly outsized accomplishment—but it really ends up serving as a distraction from the guitarist's own distinctive style. He began with Gypsy jazz and later discovered a passion for classical music when he enrolled at the Conservatoire de Paris, studying with Gérard Abiton, among others. His resulting style involves what he calls “open jazz,” which borrows from classical polyphony with cleanly articulated lines, à la guitarists like Pat Metheny and Joe Pass. Unless he's firing through those wicked, puckish lines passed down by the storied Django Reinhardt, he plays with careful, concise, poetic eloquence

balanced with a fair share of excited, energetic bursts.

Boyer met flamenco guitarist Samuelito at the conservatory, and in 2016 the two joined forces for *Coincidence*, a recording featuring their explosive merge of flamenco and Gypsy jazz styles. The following year, Boyer released *Caméléon Waltz*, an album that features jazz and classical originals, a Domenico Scarlatti piece, arrangements of pop standards like “Norwegian Wood” and “The Sound of Silence,” as well as jazz pianist Bill Evans’ “We Will Meet Again.”

In February Boyer released his second album with Samuelito, called *Sonámbulo*. I had a video chat with Boyer, who is based in Paris, about his playing style and philosophies, his guitars, and his side passion of woodworking.



Sonámbulo is your second collaboration with Samuelito. How would you describe your sound as a duo?

It's a combination of Gypsy jazz guitar and flamenco guitar, but it's not Gypsy jazz and it's not flamenco—it's just our thing that we have together.

How did you two discover your sound?

With Samuelito, we don't just meet to play together; we spend our lives together almost, because we're touring and playing together all the time. We first met in the classical guitar conservatory, so we have the same roots playing classical music. That makes our approach to music and work quite similar, even if we're playing in different styles.

What would you say is your main style as a solo guitarist?

I guess now people know me as an open guitarist. Gypsy jazz is like my mother tongue, my first language, but my language has evolved in so many different ways.

You love both jazz and classical—what do they have in common to you?

In classical and jazz, you always have to be careful about each note you play. You have to listen to every note you make and make it beautiful. Whether it's improvised or written, I tend to take care of every note the same way.

How do you make written music your own?

I think the best approach is trying to be in the present moment, even if you know what's coming after—that's what makes it true. Because there's no judgment or thinking around what you're doing, like, "OK, now I'm going to play *this*." It's just me inside the music, and that's what makes it mine. I didn't write it, but it's my personality and I'm playing it. I think what's important is just playing to be free.

How do you come up with arrangements for songs like "The Sound of Silence" or "Norwegian Wood" on *Caméléon Waltz*?

First, I have to like the song [laughs]. And then, it has to be possible for me to play it well on the guitar and deliver a feeling as powerful as the original. I can't explain it more precisely because it's so different for every song. Technically, I would say that I love to make it polyphonic—to not only play the melody and some chords around it, but more like two or more voices that link together. So there's the melody everybody knows, and then I like to add some other melodies that also have their own lives.

What led you to play electric guitar, in addition to your acoustics?

I always liked electric guitars while I was studying classical music—then I tried to play one and realized that I could do fingerstyle, which I can't do on the manouche guitar. It's really hard to play fingerstyle on the Gypsy guitar; if you want the Gypsy guitar sound, you need to really dig in with the pick. So I discovered that I like the electric guitar because I can play it like the classical guitar—with all the polyphony.

What are your main guitars and what do you like about them?

I have three main guitars: My Gypsy guitar, made by [U.S. luthier] Bob Holo, is a very versatile instrument that I actually use mainly outside of the Gypsy world; my Collings East-side Jazz LC is really great for jazz and more; and my classical guitar, made by the German luthier Christian Koehn, is an incredible and beautifully handcrafted instrument that I particularly love.

I know you learned guitar with your father—that's so special. What was that experience like?

He wanted me to play music with other people, whereas if you learn classical piano or guitar, you often play alone in front of a crowd. He did that when he was young and didn't like it, which is why he started [playing Gypsy jazz], and started it with me. We used to listen to Gypsy jazz at home, and I think he just loved the style and wanted to learn it. So we started together the same day and with the same teacher.

Does musical talent run in your family?

Well, both my parents played music when they were young. My brother plays also, but he's more into drawing, and my sister is into dancing.

You're credited for studio setup and production in the performance videos you made for *Caméléon Waltz*. Did you design those sets?

Yes, that's my studio: I built it and did the video. Actually, I like to make a new set for every new album. I made a set of *Caméléon* ones and I made the set for the first album with Samuelito. I like to build many things; I do woodworking, and I'm making a guitar.

Did you apprentice or teach yourself?

I first made a classical guitar with a friend who's a luthier. I've used molds and casts and stuff like that.

You released your first album when you were 12. Were you in school while you were producing albums, and did you excel at anything besides music in your student years?

Yeah, I was in normal school most of the time, and when I was 15 I went to [a type of school] in France where it's kind of half-school and half-music. Instead of spending the whole day in school, you spend only the morning, and then the afternoon you are free to make music. I couldn't say I was great in any subject; I was just average, nothing special.

What are you focusing on now in terms of technique?

My main focus now is trying to improvise polyphonically. So I just try to develop polyphonic language, mainly two voices, which is already difficult for me. I try to see it another way, because as guitarists we tend to really work with chord shapes, which are so guitaristic, but I mostly try to make two voices that have their own lives, you know? It's not just some chord shape that follows a melody; there is a melody and there is a bass and they really move differently.

Who are your favorite artists? Who have you been listening to a lot lately, or in general?

I listen so many different artists that it's hard to say one especially. The first names that come to me are Julian Lage, Yamandu Costa, Sönke Meinen . . . but, of course, there are many others and it would be very long to detail all of them and why. Lately, I've been listening to a lot of piano, especially the works of composer Gabriel Fauré.

It's interesting how you seem to have the ability to learn music at an accelerated pace. Have there been any hurdles for you in terms of learning guitar techniques over the years?

I would say that every time I love something, I just find a way to play it, and manage to play what I want. I really feel the passion about something makes me just *do* it. To be honest, though, I don't think I'm really fast at learning something. Again, at school I was really not fast, just normal.

Is there anything specifically you're excited to share about the new album?

First, we will make a video with every song of the album, because I love making videos and trying to find ideas about the tunes to make every video different, just as every tune is different. And the second thing is that we've made a new show, with lights and a little bit more production. It's more than just a concert.

AC

How I Learned to Make Guitars

JAYNE HENDERSON, PHOTO BY BETTY CLICKER



MICHIHIRO MATSUDA, COURTESY OF MICHIHIRO MATSUDA



ISAAC JANG, PHOTO BY DANIEL SON



KENNY HILL, PHOTO BY JON MCCORMACK

By E.E. Bradman

RANDY MUTH, PHOTO BY PATRICIA MATSON



RACHEL ROSENKRANTZ, PHOTO BY ELIZABETH NOVAK



MÓNICA ESPARZA, PHOTO BY MARK WESTLING



ERICH SOLOMON, COURTESY OF ERICH SOLOMON

Eight contemporary luthiers on the origins of their craft and more



Jayne Henderson

As the old saying goes, getting started is the hardest part. What does it take to go from loving acoustic guitars to actually building them? To answer this question, we asked a handful of luthiers to tell us their origin stories. The acclaimed members of our roundtable come from a wide variety of backgrounds: multi-instrumentalist Rachel Rosenkrantz of Atelier Rosenkrantz; composer/classical guitarist Kenny Hill of Hill Guitar Company; longtime Gryphon repairman and Matsuda Guitars owner Michihiro Matsuda; Solomon Guitars founder and archtop specialist Erich Solomon; Spanish classical builder Mónica Esparza of Esparza Guitars; RS Muth mastermind and lifelong scientist/explorer Randy Muth; steel-string expert and Musicians Institute instructor Isaac Jang of Isaac Jang Guitars; and EJ Henderson Guitars' Jayne Henderson, whose aesthetic is closely tied to that of her father, masterful guitarist/luthier Wayne Henderson. We asked about everything from mentors and tradition vs. innovation to the impact of being a player and repairperson. Sit back and listen to how they got their feet in the door—and what they've learned since.

'I was paid \$25,000 for that guitar, so I made another one!'

—JAYNE HENDERSON

AG: Jayne, your dad has built and played guitars since before you were born. Did you ever think you'd be a luthier?

Jayne Henderson: Never. I majored in psychology and developed a strong love for the outdoors, so I got a master's in environmental law and policy. After graduation, I asked my dad to let me sell one of his guitars on eBay to help pay off my loans. He agreed but said he would help me make one myself. I thought it would be horrible, but getting to know my dad and being able to understand why he loved making guitars so much was the best gift I've ever been given. Plus, I was paid \$25,000 for that guitar, so I made another one!

AG: Randy, why did you leave a great job as a chemist to build guitars?

Randy Muth: My decision to leave the pharmaceutical industry came before I decided to build guitars. My wife and I had very successful careers, both as chemists, but ultimately I was unsatisfied working in the corporate structure and with my trajectory towards management and away from the science. We also made the decision to value our time raising our young children, as we were fortunate enough to be financially secure with one income.

MÓNICA ESPARZA



MARK WESTLING

ERICH SOLOMON



COURTESY OF ERICH SOLOMON

JAYNE HENDERSON



BETTY CLUCKER PHOTOGRAPHY

AG: When did you first know that you wanted to make instruments?

Muth: My love has always been to make or build things. As a synthetic organic chemist, this is exactly what I did: I figured out how to build molecules. This particular field of science is a bit different than most in that it's not so much about doing studies and gathering data, but about using one's knowledge, intuition, and good old trial and error to make something. In my time away from work, I thought about how I could apply these basic processes in another area. Music has always been a very important part of my life, from a listener's perspective, and I wanted to make a contribution. And that's how I came to build guitars.

Isaac Jang: I've always loved playing guitars, and I had a curiosity about the sound of guitar. This curiosity led me to discover the profession of lutherie, or more specifically, guitar-making. It was a wild idea to build a guitar from scratch, but before I knew it, I found myself signing up for Galloup [School of Lutherie], which gave me my training the strong structure that allowed me to adapt to different work environments.

'There are so many guitar builders now, new and old, and the level of players and education is vast by comparison.'

—KENNY HILL

Michihiro Matsuda: I was born in Nagoya and raised in Tokyo, and I have enjoyed drawing, music, and making things by hand since I was a child. I started playing guitar in high school. I didn't have woodwork training—my major was sociology—and I didn't know anyone who made guitars by hand. By coincidence, I found a small article about a handcrafted acoustic guitar maker in a magazine at a train-station kiosk. I was fascinated, but it took me a while to come across the Roberto-Venn School of Luthiery, the only place I could find to learn about making acoustic guitars. I quit my job and decided to go to Phoenix, Arizona.

AG: Were there advantages to starting out in an era where guitar-making info was scarce?

Kenny Hill: Maybe it triggered a sense of adventure and mystery and discovery about the whole thing that seemed exotic, an allure that there might be some holy grail that could finally be revealed. That can be motivating. Today I would say the reality has surpassed the fantasy, but the grail is still waiting to be found.

MICHIHIRO MATSUDA



COURTESY OF MICHIHIRO MATSUDA



HOW I LEARNED TO MAKE GUITARS

Erich Solomon: These days, there is an endless amount of information for the beginning luthier on the internet. Some of it can cut a lot of time off your learning curve, but it is also very easy to learn other people's mistakes.

AG: Jayne, how were things different for your dad, who began building in the '60s?

Henderson: He had to figure out how to make a guitar that resembled Red Smiley's 1938 D-45 just by looking at an old songbook someone had given him. His work has been 50 years of trial and error, using what was available and figuring out what to do rather than just doing what he was told. That's a skill that can't really be taught, and it's what sets his instruments slightly ahead of so many others.

AG: What was the first instrument you built?

Muth: The first instruments I made were simple system transverse PVC flutes for my own enjoyment. From a building perspective, of course, I wanted to make something a bit more complex and more open to creative expression. The first guitar I built—I still have it—was made from an

'These days, there is an endless amount of information for the beginning luthier on the internet!'

—ERICH SOLOMON

LMI [Luthiers Mercantile International] kit, although I did deviate quite a bit from the kit.

Rachel Rosenkrantz: My very first instrument as a musician was classical guitar, so naturally, that was my first instrument as a builder. I built a Hauser to specs in order to learn—it's a perfect design to sink your teeth into lutherie. I quickly started building steel-string parlor guitars after that.

AG: What were the main things you learned from an early mentor?

Rosenkrantz: I received a strong foundation from [Shady Lea Guitars'] Dan Collins, going through the thorough motions of Building 101. Having a career in industrial design under my belt definitely helped ease the learning curve.

Henderson: The most important lesson I learned from my dad was to not stop working when the work is "good enough." If there's room for you to make it better, redo it until it is the best you're able to do. He taught me to listen to wood—to hear, for example, how

ISAAC JANG



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HOW I LEARNED TO MAKE GUITARS

shaving braces on each specific piece, top, or back is specific to that set.

Matsuda: My experience as an apprentice at Ervin Somogyi's shop is my foundation as a guitar maker. I learned so many things—not only technical aspects of guitar making, but also how to manage business, how to talk to customers, etc. Just observing what he was doing, how he was doing it, and why he did it gave me many ideas about how to survive as a guitar maker.

Solomon: Bob Benedetto's book *Making an Archtop Guitar* was formative and enlightening; a Tom Ribbecke archtop construction course showed me the process of an instrument actually coming together; and when I was first starting out, the woodworkers and craftsmen of the Hartvigson family, in Anchorage, Alaska, showed me what a craftsman really was and gave me a level of excellence to aspire to.

Jang: I started my apprenticeship with Kathy Wingert shortly after I graduated from Galloup, and I can proudly say that experience formed

'If you become a good player, you become an even better builder.'

—MÓNICA ESPARZA

and shaped my career as a guitar maker. Having spent ten years with her, not only did I learn about technical aspects, but also about mindset, approach, and attention to details.

AG: Mónica, you've spent lots of time with the great Spanish luthier José Romanillos.

Mónica Esparza: After my struggle to get into my first workshop with him, he invited me back every year to observe and share projects in his shop. Aside from the guitar workshops that I've attended throughout the years, he has also invited me to special events, such as the grand opening of the Spanish Guitar Museum in Sigüenza and the intimate workshop he did to recreate a *vihuela de mano* that was found in a convent in the north of Spain. We have become very good friends.

AG: Does being a player inform your lutherie?

Esparza: If you become a good player, you become an even better builder. Since I began studying with my current guitar teacher, my design decisions and approach have helped me improve my guitars.

Rosenkrantz: I play upright bass, bouzouki, and guitar in various styles; I have played in

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bands, ensembles, and solo, too. Once you have that experience, you can absolutely put yourself in your client's shoes and understand their needs. Making a guitar is more than designing and building an object. It is addressing a bigger picture about having a creative lifestyle.

Hill: I have the same desires for sound that everyone does—beauty, power, clarity, contrast, balance, etc.—but as a player I have also been able to home in on personal preferences for playability and the ergonomics of the guitar, to make an instrument that pleases me first, and hope that it pleases other players, as well.

Jang: I wouldn't have been a guitar maker if I hadn't been a guitar player first. I try to play whenever I can. It gives me insights as a player, and it allows me to test-drive my instruments.

AG: How does repair work influence your design decisions?

Jang: Doing repairs has helped me gain a wide range of knowledge of instruments in many different areas: sound, playability,

structure, etc. At Westwood Music [in Los Angeles], Fred Walecki gave me the opportunity to work on so many cool instruments, and seeing his way of working with his clients was an eye-opening experience. He taught me how to see the needs of each player and how to meet those needs by going extra miles. Fred would always say, "There's no traffic jam on the extra mile."

Matsuda: My repair experience at Gryphon is a foundation of my guitar making. You learn so many valuable things from repair work that apply to making guitars, and you get many new ideas from old instruments. Working at Gryphon is a great chance for me to observe the massive culture and history of American stringed instruments.

AG: How important is it to know the work of the masters before embarking on one's own path?

Muth: Very important. Actually, for the creative process, there is value in doing your brainstorming before doing your research,

but then one should do the research before attempting to execute the idea.

AG: Is it crucial for you to pass on the lessons you've learned?

Esparza: Yes. Nobody can take away our personal journeys as luthiers, but there are a lot of lessons we can share with others who are interested in continuing the tradition.

AG: How do you balance tradition, innovation, personal style, practicality, and the needs of your customers?

Esparza: There is always room for personal style and innovation—as long as luthiers don't lose sight of tradition. I am all about tradition and style. We have various opportunities within a guitar to place our signatures without having to lose respect for the instrument.

Rosenkrantz: Form and function are interlocked. It is a balance, an equilibrium between both, without sacrificing one for another. When I started lutherie, I was a designer on the innovation team at Philips during the day, using

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cutting-edge technology, while at night, I was learning how to build classical guitars traditionally. It was a funny contrast. Naturally, over time, both worlds merged.

Matsuda: I think it is important not to mix up your artistry and the needs of your clients. They will never become the same. Your artistry should be a question to your clients, not an answer. It is the same as the relationship between art and design. What I try to do is to make good questions. It's a never-ending challenge.

AG: How has the business changed since you began making guitars?

Jang: I believe we are living in the golden era of lutherie, where there are more high-quality, handmade guitars available than ever before.

Hill: There are so many guitar builders now, new and old, and the level of players and education is vast by comparison. There are so many tools and materials available . . . and so much information—too much sometimes.

Esparza: When I started building guitars almost 20 years ago, our work was admired and appreciated so much more. Today, people expect you to compete with inexpensive, factory guitars coming from other countries like China and Vietnam without really appreciating the true value of a one-of-a-kind, finely crafted instrument.

Solomon: Demand is going down while more and more people are building—not a good combo. The days of holy-grail makers like D'Angelico or D'Aquisto are dead. While there are absolutely better makers and better instruments out there today, they will never have the historical cachet of these well-regarded and well-celebrated makers. All that being said, luthiers right now are building some of the best guitars that have ever been made.

AG: What would you say to a luthier who was just starting out?

Solomon: If you want to be a full-time luthier, you really have to have guts, grit, gumption,

and be able to set yourself apart from the crowd with your vision, craftsmanship, or both.

Muth: Keep your day job until your night job pays! Also, figure out your learning style; everyone learns differently, whether it be by apprenticing or just jumping in. Finally, there is a lot of sharing of knowledge and ideas in the incredible community of luthiers. Take advantage of that!

Rosenkrantz: Even though it is important to make designs that sell, leave room for play and for projects that are more experimental. This is how discovery happens, and it's also how you keep it fun.

Henderson: Find what you have to offer that will make your instruments special to you and your customers. If you put your soul into it, you can hear it in your work. And just like Wayne Henderson, be sure to complete each task to the absolute best of your ability. If you see something isn't as perfect as you can make it, take the time to redo it. **AG**

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This Old Guitar

John Denver and his elegant fretwork

BY JEFFREY PEPPER RODGERS

In the 1970s, the music of John Denver seemed to be everywhere. Denver scored seven Top 10 singles within a few years, from “Take Me Home, Country Roads” in 1971 to “I’m Sorry” in ’75. His albums and songs crossed over the pop, country, and easy listening charts and found multigenerational fans around the world. With his wirerimmed glasses, honeyed voice, and chiming flattop guitar, Denver serenaded audiences on his own TV specials and sang with everyone from the Carpenters to Frank Sinatra to the Muppets.

How did such a gentle and sincere troubadour, straight out of the folk coffeeshouse circuit, become a global superstar? Denver himself put his finger on one reason. “For a long time now it hasn’t been OK to acknowledge certain things about yourself,” he told the *New York Times* in 1976. “For example, that you love your old lady. That it feels good to be out in the sunshine. That every once in a while on a rainy day you feel sad. That life is good. As I have been able to communicate those things for myself and to reach a large audience, that gives them support in feeling those things. . . . Nobody else is singing these songs. Everybody else is talking about how

hard life is, and here I am singing about how good it is to be alive.”

In the ’80s and beyond, the pop-music spotlight on Denver dimmed with the inevitable shifts in musical and cultural fashions, but he continued singing about love, nature, and gratitude until his life was cut short in the crash of an experimental plane he was flying in 1997. And thanks to his gift for simple and emotionally direct expression, the songs Denver wrote and interpreted have remained standard repertoire for any musicians who sing with an acoustic guitar—even if they haven’t always wanted to broadcast that fact.

“I grew up listening to a lot of music, but no small part was taken up by John Denver’s music,” Dave Matthews said in an NPR interview after he contributed a version of Denver’s “Take Me to Tomorrow” to the 2013 tribute album *The Music Is You*. “I think he was a staple for a lot of people. In a way, he was sort of mocked by the industry that he was at the top of, and mocked by what was considered cool. So there was even a time when maybe I was a little embarrassed that I had an affection for him, and maybe hid it when I was trying my best to be cool.”



While Denver's graceful melodies and mellifluous voice took center stage in his music, a central feature of all his songs was his crisp guitar work, primarily fingerstyle on both six- and 12-string guitars. He wasn't a showy player but took great care to craft guitar parts that subtly supported the vocal, often adding melodic riffs and embellishments that became inseparable from his songs. This lesson takes a tour through Denver's guitar style by way of examples inspired by some of his most enduring songs.

FIRST LOVE

The guitar that got John Denver—born Henry John Deutschendorf—started on the music path came to him from his grandmother when he was 11 years old. That instrument was a Gibson L-37 archtop from around the late '30s (though Denver himself often said it was built in 1910). On that Gibson, Denver learned to play songs from the Everly Brothers and other hit makers of the 1950s, and by the early '60s he was hooked by the Kingston Trio and leading voices of the folk revival like Joan Baez, Tom Paxton, the New Christy Minstrels, the Chad Mitchell Trio, and Peter, Paul, and Mary. After Chad Mitchell left his namesake trio in 1965, Denver got his first big break as a member of the group, which continued to tour as the Mitchell Trio through the late '60s.

Denver's L-37, which currently resides at the Musical Instrument Museum in Phoenix, Arizona, went through some misadventures. At a July 4th party one summer when Denver was working at a lumber camp in Washington state, a member of the rowdy crew apparently objected to Denver playing a Hank Williams song and bashed him with the guitar—an event memorialized with a crack across its top. Later, the Gibson went missing for about four years, and Denver celebrated its return in the song “This Old Guitar,” released on the multi-platinum album *Back Home Again*. In concert, he performed the song solo, spotlighting his connection with the instrument that, as the lyrics go, “gave me my life, my living.”

“I can't really tell you how thrilled I was about getting it back,” he said when introducing his Gibson, and the song he wrote about it, in a 1974 TV special. “I couldn't wait to get back to the hotel where I was staying at here in Los Angeles, and just sit down and be with the guitar again and play it. I did that. I got back to the hotel and we got very comfortable. I told it all that had happened to me since the last time I'd seen it. It told me a few stories. But somewhere in the conversation, we found this song.”

“This Old Guitar” is a classic folk ballad, fingerpicked with C shapes and a pattern similar to **Example 1**. Capo at the second fret to play in Denver's key of D major. Keep a steady alternating bass going throughout—pick all the notes notated with down stems with your thumb. Denver normally played with a thumbpick and fingerpicks, but bare fingers (as I use on the accompanying videos) also work fine, producing a softer and rounder sound.

The basic shapes are shown in the chord grids, but notice how at the ends of measures you often change a note to anticipate the next chord. In measure 3, on the “and” of beat 4, for



While Denver's graceful melodies and mellifluous voice took center stage in his music, a central feature of all his songs was his crisp guitar work.

instance, play the third string open to lead to the E minor chord. In measure 7, both the D on the second string and E on the first string function similarly, anticipating the next chord and creating a little syncopated melody.

TAKING FLIGHT

Denver first made his mark as a songwriter with “Leaving on a Jet Plane.” In his autobiography, *Take Me Home*, Denver described the song's birth one night in Virginia. “I picked up my guitar and wrote a song with my soul wide open and my mind picturing the scene as it stood before me, real enough to touch,” he wrote. “I called it ‘Oh, Babe, I Hate to Go.’ I wrote the song not so much out of the experience of feeling that way for someone, as out of the longing to have someone to love.”

In 1966, Denver included the song on his self-released record *John Denver Sings*—it was the album's sole original alongside four Beatles songs and other covers—and pressed a few hundred copies to give as Christmas gifts. One disc wound up in the hands of Peter, Paul, and Mary, who released their version of the song (which Denver had retitled as “Leaving on a Jet Plane” at the urging of producer Milt Okun) in 1967 on *Album 1700*. Two years later, “Leaving on a Jet Plane” had taken on new associations as a Vietnam War song; Peter, Paul, and Mary's cover was released as a single and became a Number One hit.

Though Peter, Paul, and Mary dressed up “Jet Plane” with some major sevenths and chord substitutions, Denver's rendition used a dead simple I–IV–V progression in G. In fact, as former Denver lead player Pete Huttlinger noted in his four-volume set of *Homespun* videos teaching Denver's songs, Denver stripped down the chord/bass movement in “Jet Plane” even further late in his career: He played the C as a C/G (in other words, keeping the same bass note under both the G and C chords) until the final chorus.

Denver picked “Jet Plane” on a 12-string. On six-string, the sound is less sparkly but still effective. The first four measures of **Example 2** are based on his intro, which hangs on the V chord (D). Over a drone bass on the open fourth string, play a melodic riff on the top strings, mostly on the offbeats. During the verse, shift between G and C (as in measures 5 and 6) three times and then move to a D5 (with your fourth finger on string 1, fret 5).

ALMOST HEAVEN

The song that really launched Denver as a solo artist was “Take Me Home, Country Roads,” first released on the 1971 album *Poems, Prayers, and Promises* and co-written with Bill Danoff and Taffy Nivert. The duo, who performed at the time as Fat City, was also the source of “I Guess He'd Rather Be in Colorado” (which, though seemingly tailor-made for Denver, was actually written about banjo picker and author Dick Weissman) and other staples of Denver's repertoire.

During a late-night hang after a show at the Cellar Door in Washington, D.C., Danoff and Nivert shared with Denver a fledgling version of “Country Roads.” Danoff thought the song would be a good fit for Johnny Cash and didn't expect Denver to like it, but Denver was immediately smitten and helped Danoff and Nivert finish the song in the wee hours. They performed it the following night and recorded it together for Denver's album a few months later.

Though many players strum “Country Roads” (and sometimes Denver himself did), it was normally a fingerpicking tune. In



Example 1, à la “This Old Guitar” Capo II

Chord diagrams for Example 1 (Capo II):

- C**: x32010
- G**: 3x0004
- Am**: x02310
- Em**: 012000
- F**: 134211
- Gsus4**: 3x0014
- C**: x32010
- G/B**: x2004x
- Am7**: x02010
- C/G**: 3x201x
- F**: 134211
- Gsus4**: 3x0014

Example 2, à la “Leaving on a Jet Plane”

Chord diagrams for Example 2:

- D**: xx0132
- D7**: xx0213
- D**: xx0132
- D7**: xx0213
- G**: 3x0004
- C**: x32010
- D5**: xx0124

play three times

Example 3, run an alternating bass on three strings: On the A, for instance, play strings 5, 4, 6, 4. Over the D chord in measure 7, pause the alternation for a moment to play a descending bass line back to the A. One somewhat tricky maneuver comes in measure 2, where you hammer on to the second-string D at the same time you pick the low E bass note.

Example 4 tips its hat to the lead playing of Denver sideman Mike Taylor. The riffs shown fit over the “Country Roads” chorus progression and decorate the chords with double-stops and arpeggios. If you want to play the example with a flatpick, use hybrid picking for measures 1 and 7: play the lower note with the pick and the upper note with your middle finger.

In addition to playing lead guitar, Mike Taylor, who passed away in 2010, was Denver’s co-writer on “Rocky Mountain High” (see Acoustic Classic on page 72) as well as another hit from *Poems, Prayers, and Promises*, “Sunshine on My Shoulders.” In his autobiography, Denver recalled writing the latter song “in a fit of melancholy one wet and dismal late-winter/early-spring day in Minnesota—the kind of day that makes every Minnesotan think about going down to Mexico.”



NICK SANGIAMO (PRNEWSPHOTO/LEGACY RECORDINGS)

In “Sunshine,” Denver capoed at the third fret (again playing a 12-string) and used shapes and picking patterns similar to those in **Examples 5 and 6**. Be sure to use the G fingering shown, with your third and fourth fingers, since that’ll facilitate the shift to C—keep the

latter digit in place on string 1 for both chords. When you switch to the C chord in Ex. 5, play the open fourth string with your index finger while your thumb picks the fifth-string C, and quickly hammer your second finger onto fret 2 of string 4. Ex. 6 shows the type of ascending

Example 3, à la “Take Me Home, Country Roads”

Example 3, à la “Take Me Home, Country Roads”

Chord diagrams shown: A (x01110), F#m (134111), E (023100), D (xx0132), and A (x01110).

The musical notation shows a guitar score with a treble clef and a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The bass line is indicated by numbers 0-4 on the bottom staff. The melody is written on the top staff. The score is divided into two systems, each with four measures.

The image shows a musical score for the song "The Sound of Silence" by Simon & Garfunkel. The score is written for guitar and includes a guitar tablature section. The chords are G, C, G, C, Am7, and D7/F#. The tablature section shows the fret numbers and fingerings for the guitar parts.

Chords:

- G:** 3x0004
- C:** x32014
- G:** 3x0004
- C:** x32014
- Am7:** x02010
- D7/F#:** 200314

Tablature:

The tablature section shows the fret numbers and fingerings for the guitar parts. The first part of the tablature is for the G and C chords, and the second part is for the Am7 and D7/F# chords. The tablature is written in a standard guitar notation, with the strings numbered 1 to 6 from top to bottom.

Example 1

The musical score for Example 1 consists of two staves: a guitar staff (top) and a bass staff (bottom). The guitar staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The bass staff is in bass clef. The guitar staff features a melody of eighth and quarter notes, with a repeat sign after the first two measures. Chord diagrams are provided above the guitar staff for measures 1 through 6: G (3x0004), Am7 (x02010), G/B (x20004), C (x32010), Am7 (x02010), and D7/F# (200314). The bass staff provides a harmonic accompaniment using a mix of single notes and double stops, with a repeat sign after the first two measures. The bass staff includes a TAB line with fret numbers (0, 1, 2, 3) and a standard notation line with a treble clef for the bass staff.

chord pattern used in the second section of the verse. On the Am7 and D7/F# chords in both Exs. 5 and 6, pick the top two strings simultaneously with your middle and ring fingers.

GOOD TO BE BACK HOME

The next two examples come from Denver's *Back Home Again* album, which won a string of hits and awards (and prompted the notorious incident when Charlie Rich, announcing the Entertainer of the Year at the 1975 Country Music Awards, lit Denver's name card on fire at the podium).

Example 7 is based on "Annie's Song," which Denver wrote for his first wife after an argument and reconciliation. The song came to him during a ride up a ski lift in his home of Aspen, Colorado—he often described figuring out song ideas in his head and then going to the guitar to learn them.

Originally picked on a 12-string, "Annie's Song" is in waltz time. In the first two measures of Ex. 7, play the D–Dsus4 move up at the fifth fret. On the final repetition of this pattern, you may find it helpful to substitute the open fourth string for the last note (the second-string G), to facilitate the shift down to the open G chord in the next measure. Using a first-finger barre for the A chord makes an efficient change to B minor in measures 4 and 5, and I've also suggested a barre version of an open D chord in measure 7 that allows you to keep the first and second fingers in place while moving to D/C# in the following bar.

The title track of *Back Home Again* is in a different vein than the other examples here, with a loping country/cowboy rhythm. In **Example 8**, play with a swing feel, where pairs of eighth notes sound like the first and third notes in a triplet. On each chord, alternate the bass on strings 6, 5, and 4 as shown, while picking the same pattern on top of all



the chords: third string with your index finger, top two strings together with your middle and ring fingers, and then third string again with your index.

Like so many of Denver's songs, "Back Home Again" sounds effortless—both the melody and the words. As a songwriter he cultivated that quality, trying not to control or force the process but to let the song unfold. "There are times when I'd be

struggling with a song," he wrote in *Take Me Home*, "and then when I'd get out of the way, the song would be there. In neon lights. Right in front of me. It's a way of looking, I think. What you need to see comes forward once you stop trying to see it."

FINGERSTYLE MELODIES

Denver's last Number One hit came in 1975 with "I'm Sorry," a tearjerker breakup ballad

Example 7, à la "Annie's Song"



Chord diagrams for G, D, D/C#, Bm, and A are shown above the staff. The guitar notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#), and a 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of eighth notes. The bass line is indicated by numbers 0-4 on the strings.

Chord diagrams for G, F#m, Em, G, and A are shown above the staff. The guitar notation continues with the same key signature and time signature. The melody and bass line follow the same pattern as the previous section.

Example 8, à la “Back Home Again”

Swing (♩ = ♩^{3/4})

Chord diagrams for E and A are shown above the staff. The guitar notation is in 4/4 time with a swing feel. The melody features eighth notes and the bass line uses numbers 0-2.

Chord diagrams for B7 and E are shown above the staff. The guitar notation continues with the same key signature and time signature. The melody and bass line follow the same pattern as the previous section.

released on the album *Windsong*. Two decades later, he delivered a moving performance on the 1995 *Wildlife Concert* album and video, on which he opted to play a nylon-string—a nice match for the song's intimate mood.

"I'm Sorry" is a good example of how Denver used melodic hooks in his guitar parts to tie a song together. In the final volume of his *Homespun* video series, Pete Huttlinger built on Denver's melodic picking to turn "I'm Sorry" into a sweet instrumental. (Huttlinger, a finger-style master as well as in-demand Nashville sideman, passed away in 2016 after a series of strokes—like Denver, he was only in his 50s.)

The first two measures of **Example 9** are based on the intro/interlude of "I'm Sorry." Rather than using an alternating bass pattern, pick bass notes only on beats 1 and 3; create a descending line by altering the Gmaj7 chord first to G6 and then to G. For simplicity, don't bother fretting the first or fifth strings in the G chord during the intro; just hold down the notes you actually need.

In measure 4, while holding down the G shape, add an A note on the third string and then a C on the second string at the end of the measure. These notes set up the change to the A minor chord and also anticipate the melody—the kind of small, elegant detail that was characteristic of Denver's style.



RCA RECORDS

How did such a gentle and sincere troubadour, straight out of the folk coffeehouse circuit, become a global superstar?

WRITING FOR THE WORLD

In early 2019, some new Denver music came to light, as the band Railroad Earth released *The John Denver Letters*, featuring two new songs, "If You Will Be My Lady" and "Through the Night,"

on which front man Todd Sheaffer set to music some rediscovered Denver lyrics. Both are lovely settings that sit comfortably alongside the Denver songs that have been circulating now for decades.

"Through the Night" opens with a soft fingerpicking melody and these lines:

*Here beneath the starry sky
I lay me down to rest
Peace around me, peace within
For this, my life is blessed*

As the song proceeds, the lyrics come back around and replace *I* with *you*:

*Here beneath the starry sky, love
Lay yourself to rest
Peace around you, peace within
For this, your life is blessed*

In terms of the mood and the message, it's a perfect John Denver moment—a simple, personal expression of gratitude that opens up to include anyone listening or singing along. Utterly uncynical and hard to resist.

Jeffrey Pepper Rodgers, Acoustic Guitar's founding editor, is author, most recently, of the AG lesson book/video *Beyond Strumming*.

Example 9, à la "I'm Sorry"

The musical notation for Example 9, à la "I'm Sorry", is presented in two systems. Each system consists of a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a guitar staff with a bass clef. The guitar staff includes fret numbers and picking patterns (0 for open, x for muted, and numbers for fretted notes). The first system covers measures 1 through 4, and the second system covers measures 5 through 8. Chord diagrams are provided for each measure, showing the fretting hand positions for Gmaj7, G6, G, Gadd9, Am, D7, Gmaj7, G6, and G.



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DIGITAL CONSERVATORIES

Classical guitarists are increasingly turning to the internet to learn and sharpen their skills

BY BLAIR JACKSON

It almost goes without saying that when it comes to learning classical guitar, enlisting the services of a teacher (or teachers) is the best route to systematic improvement for people serious about mastering the instrument—especially those with aspirations beyond playing as a casual pastime. But there are also many reasons why working with a teacher might not be right for you, ranging from the cost of private instruction or school programs, to the need or desire to progress independently at your own pace, to trepidations about not being comfortable performing for or being judged by another person, to wanting the absolute freedom to study what you want when you want. Or maybe you just want to learn a little classical technique to improve your playing in the multitude of other fingerstyle settings.

The good news is that there has never been a better time to pursue learning classical guitar than right now—if not from scratch, then by studying new-to-you concepts, techniques, and styles of music. And, not surprisingly, nearly everything you could possibly want to know about the subject is just a few clicks away on the internet. Besides literally thousands of free videos, written tutorials (and combinations thereof) on virtually any classical-guitar-related topic you can think of, there are also many sites offering systematic instruction, sometimes from well-known players, to help guide you—often, but not always, for a fee (annual, monthly, or per lesson; it varies).

We looked into a number of the most popular classical-guitar learning sites and offer profiles of three here; at the end you'll also find brief glimpses of four others. We would strongly urge you to do your own comparison shopping for the online learning

environment that best suits your needs, but with any luck this will aid you in that search—or at least get you thinking about what steps you might want to take next in your pursuit of becoming a better, more confident player.

THE CORNER ACADEMY

Classical Guitar Corner, Simon Powis
(ClassicalGuitarCorner.com)

Originally from Australia, New York-based guitarist Simon Powis has built his online school into one of the most widely respected sites of its kind. “I fell in love with the guitar at age 11,” he tells us, “but I didn’t experience what it is like to work with a good teacher until I was 19 and studying at university. For eight years I was passionate but lost with the guitar. I had no sense of structure and found myself feeling frustrated. I think this early experience impressed on me just how important it is to learn in a structured way—how working on the right materials at the right time can make all the difference.

“I have always loved teaching, but it wasn’t until I was writing my doctoral thesis with Ben Verdery at Yale University that I truly learned about the *craft* of teaching. The thesis was focused on sight-reading pedagogy. It opened up a whole new world for me and started me on the path to creating Classical Guitar Corner. I wanted to share what I was learning.

“Our Classical Guitar Corner Academy is for the amateur guitarist who wants a first-rate education. We are a team of five right now, and we serve adult musicians who want to learn with a structured curriculum. We offer a graded curriculum that is structured lesson-by-lesson, unit-by-unit, and grade-by-grade. From Grade 1

through Grade 8, the curriculum starts from the very beginning and guides the player all the way through to advanced pieces by Bach, Barrios, and Tárrega. More than just repertoire and technique, we also incorporate sight-reading, theory, musicianship, and ensemble playing into the curriculum.

“The Academy is all about the players and we celebrate success at every stage—whether it be the first progress-video posted or performance in a live video seminar or passing their eighth-grade advanced exam. We embrace the journey and look for joy along the way.

“Classical Guitar Corner has grown a lot since I started it in an attic ten years ago. We have a faculty of teachers around the world, the most supportive community you could ever imagine, a summer school near Boston; we publish books, we sponsor scholarships for young teachers and guitar societies, and we are constantly adding to the resources available, with guest master classes, study guides, ensemble music, theory classes, and the list goes on. But the heart of the Academy is a curriculum that is highly structured and has been continuously refined over the past decade. One of the beautiful aspects about online education is that you can adapt quickly to student feedback and that is exactly what we have done. And we have a group of supportive, kind, and enthusiastic musicians who make our jobs a joy and provide accountability, motivation, and inspiration for fellow players.

“For the past year, too, we’ve been running a ‘coaching call’ program that gives our members access to one-to-one coaching every single week. This has been a popular and extremely valuable program for those who use it, and it bridges the gap that is often missing online, which is immediate feedback and guidance.”

Simon also provides some nitty-gritty factoids: “Our website has a wealth of material, with a podcast, lessons, videos, and articles that are free to anybody who would like them. For those who want to join the Academy, we have a quarterly membership (\$150), annual membership (\$397), and annual with individual coaching (\$547). We provide members with a university/conservatory-style experience and believe that our pricing represents outstanding value for what the Academy offers.”

RAPID RISE TO THE TOP tonebase, Igor Lichmann (tonebase.co)

Having appeared on the web for the first time in 2016, San Francisco-based tonebase (yes, they insist you don’t cap the t) is one of the new kids on the block,

Classical Guitar Corner’s Simon Powis



JACQUES LEE WOOD

so to speak, but its growth has been astonishingly fast, and the site now offers hundreds of hours of tutorials on basics, technique, and how to play specific pieces in the repertoire, supplied by some of the finest classical guitarists, young and not-so-young, in the world.

Igor Lichtmann explains about the origins of tonebase, and more: “My co-founder Chris Garwood and I are both classically trained guitarists who met while pursuing a performance degree in Ben Verdery’s class at the Yale School of Music. While there, we attended a class called Careers in Music, which was a semester-long, project-based seminar on the theme, ‘If you were to change one thing in the music world, what would it be?’ Chris and I always felt that access to really great musicians has been restricted, and we figured there must be an easier way for music lovers, students, amateurs, professionals, and teachers to access knowledge from the best artists in the world. That notion became the foundation of the project we started pursuing within that class. This eventually resulted in our teaming up with our third co-founder, Abhi Nayar, who was a computer science and economics major at Yale at that time and was instrumental in building out the initial version of our site.”

Who is the tonebase audience? “We cater to a few different types of players. Mostly our audience consists of teachers and professionals, invested hobbyists, and folks just starting out. We always make sure that we create our tutorials with a clear type of player in mind. For instance, in addition to having courses on basic technique fundamentals, we just released a very detailed course for the very beginner, taught by the outstanding L.A. pedagogue Daniel de Arakal, guiding them from their first day with the guitar to being able to play a simple Carcassi etude at the end. At the same

time, catering to the professional crowd, we have tutorials on monumental works like the Antonio José *Sonata* taught by the great Zoran Dukic, as well as warmup routines by Pepe Romero that many teachers implement in their lesson plans. In total we have accumulated over 250 lessons on all things guitar from some of the most iconic players, such as Leo Brouwer, Sharon Isbin, Sérgio Assad, and dozens more.

“I think those different types of videos can live well together on one platform, and in fact really complement each other. We’re building a resource for the entire guitar community. The common denominator is quality: People, regardless of their development, life situation, or proficiency level, want to learn from the best. And our mission is to cater to that wish. The idea of sharing their thoughts with an engaged audience of passionate learners has resonated with most of the artists we’ve had the luck of collaborating with so far.

“I’d really encourage players, regardless of their perceived proficiency, to check out the platform,” Lichtmann says. “Our company motto is ‘To Educate and Inspire,’ and though, of course, it’s important to master all the basics and fundamentals of guitar technique, it’s as important to have the inspiration to play. There’s no easy road to guitar mastery. It takes years of solid practice, and results come over time. The difference between a good and a great teacher is that the great teacher knows how to inspire students and help them discover a whole new world of self-expression through music.”

On a practical level, “We have a pretty neat interactive video player that makes it super fun to follow along with the explanations of the instructor. Every tutorial comes with a carefully curated, downloadable workbook PDF, and we will be rolling out a



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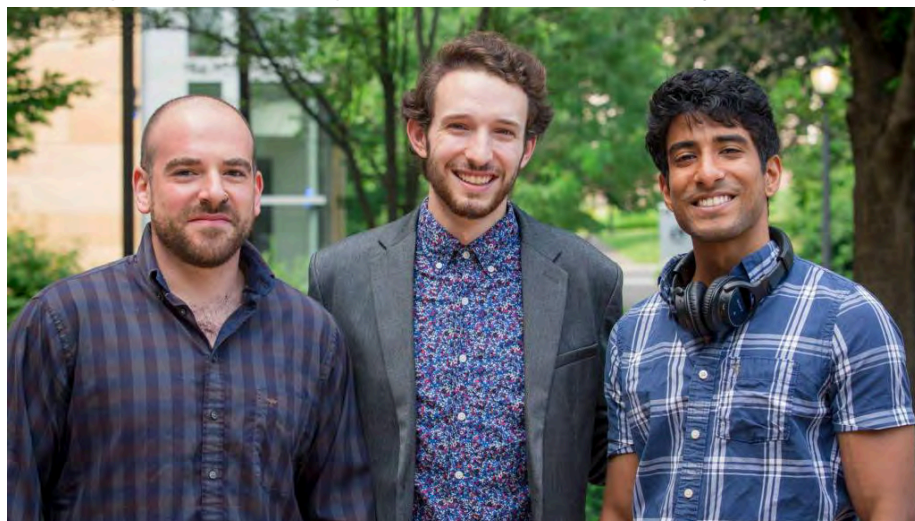
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CLASSICAL GUITAR



The founding tonebase team (L to R): Igor Lichthmann, Chris Garwood, and Abhi Nayar



number of exciting features over the next few months and introducing community features to create a real hub for musicians and music lovers online.” The platform offers a considerable amount of free content; as for pricing, there’s always a free one-week trial available, and then the rates are \$29.95 monthly (\$19.95 per month if you buy an annual subscription), and \$495 for a lifetime membership—though discounts are frequently offered on all programs.

A HEARTY SUPPLEMENT

This Is Classical Guitar, Bradford Werner
(ThisIsClassicalGuitar.com)

British Columbia-based guitarist/pedagogue Bradford Werner says, “I originally created the site for my students at the Victoria Conservatory of Music. I wanted my youth and teen students to see high-quality guitar playing to supplement their [in-person] lessons. It was a way for my students to absorb the culture, musical ideas, and technique of classical guitar. I also posted free lessons and sheet music to support what I was teaching in person. Many of my students didn’t know what classical guitar really was, since classical guitar is a strange name for the variety of music we play. So, in short, the site answers the question: What is classical guitar?”

“My audience is a mix of college-age guitar students, adults, and my youth students. I feature a lot of younger players because, again, I want my students to see more than just established old men playing guitar—classical guitar wasn’t always as diverse as it is today. So, I aim for a nice mix of youthful and emerging players, but also some established professionals. This really helps build youth enthusiasm.

Plus, you can’t expect 12-year-olds to watch a 200-pound man holding the guitar and expect them to imitate that. They need to see players with similar body types and high levels of technique and musical skills. I try to cater to all levels but it’s sometimes random, because I mainly post newly released videos or something I’m currently teaching in person.

“The site has over 150 lessons, 1,500 articles, reviews, and sheet music, so there’s plenty to explore. Werner Guitar Editions is my dedicated sheet music store. There came a point when I wanted to separate the business side of what I was doing in order to keep the main blog free for my students. When the site became a full-time job, I needed to start creating some premium projects and so WGE was born. If people don’t want to spend money they can just avoid it—This Is Classical Guitar is completely free in terms of viewing, lessons, and videos. I’m really for the open web and will never form a paywall. WGE has been fun for me, as I enjoy creating new repertoire editions and making video performances and lessons of the scores.

“I get a lot of positive feedback about my email newsletter. It’s a weekly dose of guitar content to help students absorb the culture slowly over time. Students need to get exposure to the different styles of guitar and lute, and taking even five minutes a week to watch high-quality content goes a long way. There’s so much great stuff online today and most of my followers join multiple newsletters and sites such as [AcousticGuitar.com’s sister site] ClassicalGuitarMagazine.com or ClassicalGuitarCorner.com. This Is Classical Guitar is a great way to supplement and enrich your music studies. But remember that in-person lessons with a good teacher are still the best way to learn and interact with music.” **AC**

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Fundamentals of Classical Guitar (Berklee College of Music)

Twelve-week, college-level course from David Newsam, director of Berklee’s Classical Guitar Chamber Program, delves into basics and specific genres/techniques such as Brazilian, tango, folk, percussive playing, and more.

Cost: \$1,250–\$1500
online.berklee.edu/courses/fundamentals-of-classical-guitar

LAGA Online Classical Guitar Lessons

The Los Angeles Guitar Academy’s program includes access to 2,400 prerecorded lessons dealing with everything from posture and nails and warmups to the fine points of technique. Webcam/Skype lessons available, as are downloadable PDFs.


Cost: \$37/month for prime membership; free trial
onlineguitaracademy.net/online-classical-guitar-lessons

JamPlay

This massive website offers many teachers in many different styles of guitar, as well as a plethora of teaching features, but a search will turn up three different tracks of classical guitar instruction, including 37 intermediate lessons from Pamela Goldsmith and 30 from Evan Taucher on modern classical guitar.

Cost: \$49/month or \$399/year
jamplay.com/guitar-lessons/genres/15-classical

For a descriptive list and links to 22 different online options for learning classical guitar, including the above four, go to cmuse.org/learn-classical-guitar-lesson-online.



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BEYOND FLATTOPS

THE MAGIC OF RESONATOR, BARITONE, AND ARCHTOP GUITARS

Ever since the Spanish luthier Antonio de Torres Jurado pioneered the design of the modern classical guitar in the mid-1800s, guitar makers have been toying with ways of making louder instruments with wider tonal ranges. These experiments have resulted in structural deviations from the traditional flattop guitar—changes that must have seemed revolutionary when they were introduced, but which are now standard designs that guitarists of all stripes tend to take for granted.

The archtop guitar, for instance, is distinguished by its carved top, floating bridge, and separate tailpiece—features that, on the best instruments, offer enhanced projection and an unmistakable punchiness—a boon for ensemble players before the introduction of the electric guitar, especially those in big bands. Also a solution to the problem of volume, resonator guitars, with their internal sound-transmitting cones, were

originally designed for Hawaiian music but came to be closely associated with blues, country, bluegrass, and other rootsy American styles.

Modern baritone guitars were first seen in electric form, existing somewhere in the space between standard and bass guitars. Eventually, acoustic baritones hit the market. Though they might not be as widely used as their archtop and resonator counterparts, baritones offer acoustic players a new world of arranging possibilities, as they extend the guitar's range down by a perfect fourth or fifth in standard baritone tuning.

AG recently asked three of our contributing writers—Sean McGowan, Greg Olwell, and Emile Menasché, who have spent a lot of time with archtop, resonator, and baritone guitars, respectively—to talk about the history of these instruments, the makers and players associated with them, and how you can get your hands on one, no matter your budget. — Adam Perlmutter

Special thanks to vintage guitar expert George Gruhn for reviewing some of the historical aspects of this piece.

BRILLIANT RESONANCES

Resonator guitars became an integral voice in American music

BY GREG OLWELL

The quest for loud guitars came long before Les Paul, Leo Fender, and a host of other innovators developed workable electric guitars and amplification. As the relatively quiet and small-bodied guitars of the 19th century left the small, genteel parlors of homes for larger public spaces, they needed to become louder to accompany violin, piano, or brass instruments. This resulted in the guitar being transformed from the refined, delicate instrument still tied to a European model to one more stereotypically American—big and loud. As the 20th century began to ramp up, several American makers began fundamentally changing the guitar to meet the needs of the players who wanted to be heard on a bandstand, juke joint, or busy downtown sidewalk.

In this arms race for more volume and presence, guitar makers began building larger and larger instruments and experimenting with different construction concepts, like new bracing systems and mechanical amplification. Out of all these innovations, the resonator guitar stands out for its solution of using a spun aluminum cone (or cones) to turn a player's picking energy into ear-tingling music.

During the last two decades, the resonator has seen a reawakening, with instruments becoming more affordable through overseas mass production, and at the same time more innovative, as smaller builders continue to refine the basic concept that's nearly 100 years old.

A RADICAL INVENTION

For anyone familiar with the gutsy chime of a shiny, nickel-plated National or the lonesome wail of a Dobro, it's almost hard to imagine how radical these guitars were when they were new. The sound of a guitar relied on a vibrating wooden box to produce sound, but all of that changed in the late 1920s, when a Slovak-born luthier named John Dopyera was tasked by an American guitarist, George Beauchamp, to create a guitar loud enough to play melodic parts on the bandstand.

As an inventor who already had a few patents to his name, Dopyera devised a way to make the guitar louder using three very thin aluminum cones, driven by the strings vibrating a T-shaped bridge. The cones operate nearly identically to the speaker cones in your home stereo or guitar amp, though they face the back

of the guitar and their sound is reflected off the rear. In 1927, the success of this instrument led Dopyera, Beauchamp, Dopyera's two brothers—Rudy and Emil—and a group of investors to form the National String Instrument Corporation in Los Angeles. The dramatic story of the invention and the contentious aftermath is covered in great depth in Bob Brozman's *The History and Artistry of National Resonator Instruments* (Centerstream) and is a worthy read for anyone interested in learning more.

These first three-coned instruments were called tricones, and they immediately caught on with the Hawaiian guitarists that were very popular in this era, like Sol Hoopii. The tone of these guitars could be almost liquid, with complex overtones, a reverberating quality, and a lot of sustain. The instruments found favor with players as diverse as Tampa Red, who played his singular slide guitar parts on an elaborately engraved gold-plated Style 4, and the criminally overlooked Oscar Alemán, who played fingerstyle with a thumbpick and recorded a handful of breathtaking recordings on a National Style 1. Alemán led the singer Josephine Baker's band in prewar Paris and was widely considered Django Reinhardt's main competition until he fled the Nazis and returned to his native Argentina. As Michael Dregni writes in Greg Ruby's *Oscar Alemán Play-Along Songbook* (excerpted in the November/December 2019 issue of *AG*), Alemán's tricones "were deemed essential to the Nazi war efforts and were to be melted down to be made into weapons of war."

In response to the Great Depression, National introduced a less complex design that was more cost-effective to build. These more affordable guitars used one large cone, with a small bridge attached to the top of the cone, called a biscuit. Single-cone, or biscuit-style, resonators became the most popular design among country, folk, blues, and gospel musicians, who found ways to capitalize on the instrument's strong attack, ideally suited for styles like Piedmont blues and ragtime. The list of players who used single-cone Nationals is as diverse as it is long and includes such greats as Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Blind Boy Fuller, Booker "Bukka" White, Son House, Hawaiian guitarist King Bennie Nawahi, Scrapper Blackwell, and countless others.

The single-cone's development caused a lot of internal friction at National, and Dopyera

and his brothers left to form a new resonator company, Dobro. The name was a clever one, incorporating Dopyera, while nodding to the brothers' native tongue with a word that means "good" in Slovakian (*dobry*).

The Dobro and National systems share the same basic idea—using a metal resonator to amplify the guitar's tone—but with one very important difference. Instead of reflecting the cone's sound off of the back of the guitar, the new Dobro design used a cone that faced outward, away from the guitar, which called for a web-like bridge to power the instrument's cone. A spider bridge, as the design came to be known, produces a sweeter and more sustaining sound than a biscuit-style resonator, but not as rich as a tricone. Spider bridges found favor first with country and later with bluegrass musicians.

The rise of the electric guitar and the onset of World War II effectively ended production of resonator guitars, though they remained popular with artists who continued to make music with them until interest in their unique tones again began building in the 1980s.

A SPECIALIZED MARKET

Because the resonator is a niche instrument in the acoustic-guitar world, many of today's makers tend to be specialists who make this instrument type exclusively. The market is quite specialized, too, which allows it to be nimble, with many unique and exotic variations on the resonator theme being produced by small custom builders and larger factory makers alike.

The allure of a vintage guitar is undeniable, and classic Dobros and Nationals are relatively affordable. But in most cases, modern resonators are more playable and sonically on par with—or even better-sounding than—the earliest examples, which often suffer from poor intonation (at least on the round-neck models) and inconsistent manufacturing techniques, not to mention the ravaging effects of time. Many of today's builders use CNC machinery to create necks and bodies with far greater precision than was possible decades ago, resulting in guitars that play more in-tune and are consistent from instrument to instrument.

National Guitars, which was founded in 1989 and is based in San Luis Obispo, California, is a leader in integrating modern construction aids like CNC with the considerable amount of

National Style O Deluxe



DEANNA MONTALBAN

handwork that goes into soldering brass, steel, and German-silver bodies together or creating wooden guitars. The company has not only recreated many of the most desirable vintage models, it has improved on the resonator's usability, while offering unique finishes and decoration that have helped redefine what the instrument can be. And having recently acquired the revered Scheerhorn brand of spider-cone guitars, National now offers dobro-type models. Prices for these American-made guitars begin at \$3,100 (MSRP) and go up quickly with different finish, body material, and electronics options.

Just like steel-string acoustic players, resonator guitarists often crave unique instruments, which leads some of them to turn to smaller makers for custom pieces. You can find high-quality boutique resonators from John Morton, Mule, Ron Phillips, and Trussart, among other U.S. builders. Likewise, several smaller makers focus on dobro-style guitars, with companies like Beard (see a review of the A-Model Odyssey on page 92) producing what are arguably the finest examples in the resonator guitar's history.

Players looking to spend less than \$1,000 on a new or used resonator guitar have many options to choose from in spider- and biscuit-type resonators. The resonator scene is dominated by instruments made in China and sold in the U.S. under several familiar brands. In this price range, you'll find some with historic allegiances, like Dobro, Regal, and Gretsch, as well as other legacy companies—Dean, Recording King, and Washburn—that didn't have resonators back in the day, but now offer a mouth-watering buffet of options to choose from at prices not possible in American-made guitars. Other relative newcomers, like Republic and Royall, are making waves with unique models that summon modern aesthetics, like steampunk.

Most resonator designs fall into the two traditional choices—a steel-, brass-, or wood-bodied biscuit-style modeled after a National, or a wooden Dobro-type guitar. Still, like the higher-end instruments, these more affordable options may offer more cutaways, electronics, and slimmer necks, to appeal to today's guitarists who may have rootsy sounds in their ears yet want modern playability. Regardless of your budget, there is something out there that can satisfy your musical cravings for the unique sounds of a resonator guitar. **AC**

TAKING ON THE TWEENER

The baritone and its in-between position in the guitar world

BY EMILE MENASCHÉ

If the baritone guitar were a basketball player, it would probably end up on the scouting report as a tweener—a player whose size and skills don't fit a standard position. Think six-foot-six, 250-pound Charles Barkley: too short for power forward, too beefy for small forward—and too good for the opposition.

Like Barkley—who earned such nicknames as “Sir Charles,” “The Round Mound of Rebound,” and “The Leaning Tower of Pizza” over his hall-of-fame career—at first glance, the baritone guitar may not look like an easy fit into your lineup. For one thing, it's typically tuned a fourth or fifth below the standard six-string—from B1 to B2 or A1 to A2—falling in the zone between guitar and bass. For another, it doesn't have a ton of repertoire of its own. That can be a challenge, even for experienced players. “I think of the baritone guitar as a transposing instrument like a trumpet or saxophone,” says noted session player and solo artist Sean Harkness, who began playing the acoustic baritone in 2008. “Everything is down a fourth. For 40 years that's been a G chord—I can't all of a sudden think of it as D—just can't do it. So I transpose.”

Yet like an overlooked athlete who turns into an all-star, the baritone acoustic is a winner in the hands of players like Harkness. And with instruments from Collings, Santa Cruz Guitar Company, Walden, Ovation, Alvarez, and Ibanez currently available, guitarists of all budgets can dip into the deep end. (Note: Taylor has made a number of baritone guitars in recent years. However, like the 326e reviewed in the January 2016 issue of *AG*, these are not in current production but are available in the used market. While some of the recent Taylor baritones have eight strings, these are essentially tuned as six-string guitars; the third and fourth strings are arranged in 12-string-style octave pairs.)

CLOUDY ORIGINS

The origins of the baritone guitar as we now know it are a bit murky. In the 1800s, some European makers produced baritones, but very little is known about these instruments, other than the obvious fact that they were acoustic. On his website oranjproductions.com, musician and writer Mike Freeman considers the ancient,

cello-like viola da gamba and Gibson's mandocello as precursors to the baritone guitar.

But the baritone guitar as we know it has much more recent roots. Some historians call the late 1950s Danelectro Baritone the first of its kind. It was never a bestseller, but it did add low twang to 1960s rock, country, and Spaghetti Western soundtracks. Others contend that the Dano was intended to be tuned an octave lower than standard, making it a more of six-string, guitar-bass hybrid—albeit one with the same relative tuning as a six-string guitar—than a true baritone. The Fender Bass VI (introduced in 1961) also falls into this category.

If the baritone guitar were a basketball player, it would probably end up on the scouting report as a tweener—a player whose size and skills don't fit a standard position.

According to Freeman, a closer forbear of today's baritone was built by luthiers Joe Veillette and Harvey Citron in the 1970s. Making guitars for John Sebastian (of Lovin' Spoonful fame), Veillette came up with a 27-inch scale length, putting the instrument squarely between the guitar and bass. “Before that I was achieving the [baritone] effect by capoing Fender six-string basses at the fifth fret, as the Spoonful had done on Jug Band Music,” Sebastian says.

A MATTER OF SCALE

Because the baritone pitch range typically falls in between the six string and bass guitar, it is possible to play a standard guitar as a baritone by putting on heavy strings and tuning down. A good illustration is the seven-string guitar. The seventh string is typically tuned to low B, which allows the guitar to cover both the baritone and standard pitch range (B1–E3). Yet while the fretboard is

wider, most seven-strings use the same scale length as their six-string counterparts.

But a true baritone guitar isn't just a tuned-down six-string. Its proportions are designed to offer the ideal playing feel and tone for the lower pitches. Perhaps the main difference—and this is true of both acoustic and electric baritones—is the fretboard scale. On most standard guitars, that scale runs between 24 inches and 25.5 inches. The baritone acoustic guitars I surveyed have scale lengths between 26.75 and 28.33 inches. Harkness's Walden B-1E—which he helped develop with luthier Jonathan Lee—has a 26.75-inch scale. The Ibanez AE255BT measures 27 inches, as does the 12-fret Santa Cruz baritone, designed with the late guitarist Bob Brozman and set up to be tuned a major third lower than standard pitch. The two Collings baritones, 1 and 2H, come in at 27.5; the Alvarez ABT610E's scale measures 27.7 inches.

Then there's the 28.33-inch Ovation Elite A/E D-Scale model. It's longer than the typical baritone, yet according to Ovation, is designed to be tuned down to D—i.e., just a full step lower than standard. Evidently, if you capo at the second fret, you have standard tuning at a relatively standard scale length. That said, with 28 inches to play with, the Ovation should handle tunings down to full baritone range.

As a point of comparison, you'll find electric baritones on both ends of the above scale range. The Supro Westbury SS and Reverend Descent RA are both slightly shorter at 26.5 inches. Dean, ESP, and Ibanez are among the brands offering 27-inch scale baritone electrics. Danelectro's 56 Baritone (29.75 inches), and the 30-inch Fender Bass VI fall into that disputed baritone-versus-bass category mentioned above.

Having spent a lot of quality time with a 26.75-inch-scale baritone—as well as many down-tuned standard guitars—I can vouch for the importance of the extended scale. You might need long fingers to play a barred F chord at anything above, say, 26 inches, but it's worth the occasional stretch to get a tight and predictable attack when playing the lower-pitched B. Just as important, the tighter strings are easier to keep in tune. As for the longer-scale instruments, chording may be a chore, but they do give you the option of tuning down a full octave, which opens up

Collings Baritone 2H



some alternate tuning possibilities as well. How does DADGAD transposed down into baritone range (A E A D E A) ring your bell?

BODY SIZE AND RESONANCE

While an electric guitar with a longer neck fits easily into baritone range, acoustic baritones are a little more complicated because the instrument needs to resonate at a lower frequency. Yet baritone doesn't necessarily mean bulky. For example, compare Collings' Baritone 1 with one of its dreadnoughts, the D1. In addition to its 27.5-inch scale vs. the D1's 25.5, the Baritone 1 is a 16th of an inch wider at the nut and has a slightly longer body (20.75 vs. 20 inches). While the D1 has a 14th-fret neck junction, the Baritone 1's neck joins the body at the 13th fret, which places the bridge in a sweet spot for the instrument's tuning and for the brace positions. Both guitars are 4.875 inches deep and 15.625 inches wide at the lower bout. Conclusion: If you're used to a big-bodied acoustic, the transition to baritone may be fairly easy.

That's not to minimize the differences inside the box. From bracing to neck joinery to many subtle changes, a good baritone is designed to deliver all the nuances and tonal complexity one would expect from a standard-tuned guitar, just lower. Not all baritones are larger than their standard siblings. "The Walden B1-E [which will return to the U.S. market in 2020] has a standard grand auditorium body," Harkness says. "They made it work by moving the bridge further into the lower bout and offsetting the soundhole to accommodate the baritone-specific bracing."

REACH FOR IT

Whether your budget is sub-\$500, ten times that, or somewhere in between, the baritone is a tweener that comes with challenges—yet one where a little effort can pay major dividends. "With a longer scale length and heavier strings, it can be daunting to reach things sometimes," admits Harkness. "Fingering and expressing the melody while supporting yourself with bass notes and chords is where it's at, and a baritone is so richly rewarding when it works. With a baritone acoustic I can be an entire band—bass, drums, and guitar—on one instrument." **AC**

CARVING OUT A NICHE

Gibson's Master Model L-5 set the stage for the modern archtop

BY SEAN MCGOWAN

The eloquent, distinct archtop guitar has blossomed in scope alongside the development of 20th century American music, playing an important role in jazz, blues, and Western swing, into early rock 'n' roll, roots, and rockabilly. Early influential guitarists such as Maybelle Carter and Eddie Lang—as well as contemporary players like Julian Lage and David Rawlings—have helped the archtop maintain its iconic status.

Though long favored by jazz and swing guitarists, the archtop is currently enjoying a revival among roots and Americana musicians, flatpickers, and singer-songwriters looking to expand their textural palettes. Archtops also enjoy a fan base of passionate enthusiasts and collectors, who seek out vintage examples as well as contemporary designs by modern luthiers.

VIOLIN-INSPIRED DESIGN

Many different types of guitars fall under the archtop designation, but whether fully or semi-acoustic, and with or without electronics, they share distinguishing traits. An archtop's soundboard is carved from a single hunk of wood (usually composed of two pieces that are book-matched and joined together), with the top arched upward away from the back and sides, as on a violin. The back is often carved in a similar manner, but some archtops have flat backs. Archtop soundboards are typically constructed of spruce; the backs and sides are maple or, less commonly, mahogany, walnut, or other tonewoods. An acoustic archtop borrows other features from the violin family, including opposite-facing f-holes (though some archtops have more traditional soundholes instead), a floating bridge, and a rear-mounted tailpiece.

The design of the modern archtop is most commonly attributed to the luthier Orville Gibson. In 1898, Gibson applied for a patent for a mandolin and guitar design, intended to utilize the aforementioned features to enhance “power and quality of tone.” Early Gibson archtops, like Gibson's L-1 and Style O, featured round or oval soundholes. The year 1923 saw the release of Gibson's first Master Line L-5 Professional Model, which would become the benchmark for all archtop

makers. While the L-5 shared some characteristics with previous models, like a 16-inch lower bout and an adjustable bridge (a feature first seen on Gibson mandolins in 1921), it sported some bold new elements: a pair of parallel tone bars for soundboard bracing, f-holes, and an elevated fingerboard. It should be noted that while the L-5 is often credited to Gibson's “acoustic engineer,” Lloyd Loar, who signed the labels of the earliest examples, his role in the instrument's design and construction has in fact been called into question as marketing hyperbole.

The L-5 was almost an afterthought in a quartet of Gibson offerings that also included the F-5 mandolin, the H-5 mandola, and the K-5 mandocello. And despite its powerful

Contemporary acoustic guitarists of all styles are enjoying handmade, vintage, and production archtops in their quest for unique tone, style, and overall vibe.

tone and pristine appearance, the guitar wasn't an immediate success. Few musicians could afford an L-5, which originally cost \$275, plus about \$40 for a case (around \$4,700 in today's money for both). Compare that to the price of a Ford Model T (\$265 in 1924)—or the fact that during the Great Depression many laborers earned just a dollar for a day's work. But thanks in large part to jazz star Eddie Lang, the L-5 developed a formidable reputation. At the same time, in 1928, the country pioneer Maybelle Carter used earnings from her first recordings to purchase the brand-new L-5 that she played for the rest of her career.

Before the advent of amplification, country and jazz guitarists needed acoustic instruments that could be heard as clearly as banjos, fiddles, horns, and drums. In 1934, Gibson introduced the Super 400 model, with its 18-inch lower bout. Throughout the

'30s, other makers, competing for the attention of big-band guitarists, also produced larger and louder archtops—Epiphone's 18-1/2-inch Emperor being a prime example. The Boston-based luthier Elmer Stromberg went even bigger with the stunning Master 400, which featured a 19-inch lower bout and a single diagonal top brace. Legendary jazz guitarist Freddie Green favored Strombergs throughout his long tenure with the Count Basie Orchestra.

MADE IN NEW YORK

John D'Angelico, who opened a shop in New York City in 1932, was one of the most influential individual luthiers associated with the archtop. His New Yorker and Excel models are among the most sought-after examples by players and collectors alike. D'Angelico, sometimes with the help of his assistant, Vincent “Jimmy” DiSerio, built over 1,000 instruments—all by hand. D'Angelico's archtop guitars, most of them custom orders, became the instruments of choice for New York's jazz and studio elite, such as Johnny Smith, Chuck Wayne, and Billy Bauer.

In 1952, D'Angelico took on a young apprentice named James D'Aquisto, who would become a highly influential luthier in his own right. Cristian Mirabella, an innovative luthier and restoration specialist based in Saint James, New York, also had the opportunity to apprentice with D'Aquisto and shares this perspective: “The flow of the archtop is so appealing—the seemingly soft, yet bold and strong lines that define the instrument's shape and contours. It is the most versatile of all styles of guitar construction and is truly the most challenging to build. It forces you to have an intimate relationship with the wood, because it's your knowledge of how to carve that piece of wood that's going to bring out the sound. Its abilities are as diverse as the players who choose to pick it up.”

AN ARCHTOP RESURGENCE

The acoustic archtop's stature began to diminish in the 1950s, as guitarists in increasing numbers turned to electric instruments. But the 1990s witnessed a resurgence of the archtop's popularity with players, collectors,

1933 Gibson L-5 with replacement 1920s-style fretboard



RETROFRET VINTAGE GUITARS/GEORGE ASLAENDER

and luthiers, many of whom were inspired by luthier Robert Benedetto's landmark book, *Making an Archtop Guitar*. In 1995, noted collector Scott Chinery, inspired by the exquisite finish on his D'Aquisto Centura, commissioned the "Blue Guitar" project, in which a stellar group of traditional and modern luthiers built blue archtops. This project was documented in Ken Vose's book *Blue Guitar* and serves as inspiration for many of today's builders and their clients.

The archtop continues to enjoy significant developments in the hands of talented guitarists and builders alike. Luthiers such as John Monteleone, Linda Manzer, Ken Parker, Tom Ribbecke, Tim Frick, Erich Solomon (see page 18), Otto D'Ambrosio, Tad Brown, Maegan Wells, Tyler Wells (no relation), and others are offering breathtaking innovations while bridging the gap between archtop and flattop construction.

Fully acoustic archtop guitars have long been rarities among production models. But brands like Eastman and The Loar offer a range of very good examples at compelling prices. At the other end of the price spectrum, and built in very limited numbers, Collings offers hand-carved archtops like the AT 16 and AT 17, with 16- and 17-inch lower bouts, respectively. And Waterloo's recent WL-AT model (reviewed in the September/October 2019 issue) takes its cue from budget 1930s Recording King models.

Contemporary acoustic guitarists of all styles are enjoying handmade, vintage, and production archtops in their quest for unique tone, style, and overall vibe. Tyler Wells, the luthier behind LHT Guitars, shares this perspective: "I think that archtops are becoming more popular with people who might not have traditionally gravitated toward them, such as fingerstyle guitarists and singer-songwriters. I'm an electric player, but I'm interested in building acoustic instruments; the archtop is the obvious intersection of those two worlds. If you combine the evolution of the instrument with the way guitar music has branched out and cross-pollinated between genres, I think more players than ever would find that the voice of the modern archtop really appeals to them." **AC**

Interpretive Dance

The protocols for playing ‘Romanza’—or any classical guitar standard

BY MICHAEL CHAPDELAINE

THE PROBLEM

You’re uncertain about how to embark on playing a somewhat challenging piece, in a way that makes it likely that you’ll play it really well—and that people will want to hear it.

THE SOLUTION

Establish some useful protocols for making a beautiful, expressive, and logical interpretation of a classical guitar standard.

So, you want to play a composition like the 19th-century “Romanza,” eh? Well that’s a great idea, as long as you make it beautiful. What? Beauty is subjective! To some extent, yes, but there are some objective aspects about interpreting and performing music, an awareness of which will make for a better performance of any composition. Of course, knowing more about a piece can always help you play it better.

1 CONSIDER THE BUILDING BLOCKS

Regarding harmony, the preset concept of guitar chords is a fairly modern one in classical music. Chords are harmonic states of being at any moment in the piece. You can identify their quality and make decisions about expression by observing their notes in the vertical plane. Each chord has some kind of emotional energy depending on its quality (i.e., major, minor, diminished, etc.). Dominant seventh and diminished chords create tension that usually resolves when the next major or minor chord occurs. Tension implies that we *crescendo* (get louder) and resolution implies *diminuendo* (quieter).

A *cadence* is a progression of at least two chords that usually concludes a phrase or section. An *authentic cadence*—the most powerful entity in Western harmony—is the V–I progression. The relationship of V–I is that of tension and release, which can be manifested by playing the V chord more loudly than the I.

Rhythm is the temporal aspect of music—when the notes happen in the horizontal flow



COURTESY OF MICHAEL CHAPDELAINE

of the piece. The smaller a note’s rhythmic value, the shorter it lasts and the sooner the subsequent notes can be played, making the music seem quicker and/or denser. Although the rhythm is usually fixed by the composer, in a solo context you can modify it by applying brief periods of *rubato*—the bending of tempo for expressive effect, either through *ritardando* (slowing down) or *accelerando* (speeding up). A *ritardando* can increase emotional intensity when paired with *crescendo* and decrease intensity when combined with *decrecendo*. *Accelerando* is almost always used for raising intensity.

Guitarists have three basic texture types at their disposal: *monophonic*, single notes played at any rhythm; *homophonic*, more than one note, moving at the same rhythm; or *polyphonic*, more than one note, played in different rhythms. For guitar, texture is also about slurs (hammer-ons and pull-offs), dynamics (relative loudness and softness), articulation (how short or long you make any

note), and range (encompassed by the highest and lowest notes in a piece).

While melody is the most easily observable element (it’s seen here in the up-stemmed notes), it’s also what most guitarists take for granted. The most important tool you have for this element of music is to keep a consistent volume differential between melodic and accompaniment notes.

Form pertains to how the music is organized. In the case of “Romanza,” this is in 16-bar sections of contrasting character—more on that in a bit.

2 ANALYZE THE SCORE

Now let’s analyze some of “Romanza.” (Note that the music here is in standard notation only, which is the traditional practice for classical repertoire, but you can download a free PDF that also includes tablature at AcousticGuitar.com.)

Begin by asking yourself some questions pertaining to harmony. What key is “Romanza”



"Romanza"

Anonymous

4 0 3 3 3 2 2 1 0 1 4

5 4 2 4 4 1 3 1 3 4 1 2 3

10 4 3 1 4 2 2 1 0 3 2 3

To Coda 1. 2. rit.

A tempo CII CVII 1/2CIX 1/2CV CII 1. 2. **D.C. al Coda** **Coda**

18 4 2 0 4 4 2 4 1 2 3 1 2 3

23 4 3 2 1 1 4 4 4 1 1 3

27 3 2 4 1 3 1 3 3 4 2 3 1 4 1 3

32 0 2 3 4 3 0 2 3 0 1 3 0 1 3 rit.

36 **A tempo** 3 4 2 1 4 2 1 0 2 1 0 2 4 0 1 5

in? Does it modulate, and if so, what key does it ultimately finish in? A scan through the notation reveals that the piece begins in E minor, then modulates to E major in bar 18; the music returns to E minor after bar 34.

Where are the cadences and how should they direct your expression? There are authentic cadences between measures 10–11 and 14–15 (both V–i or B–Em) and 23–24, 31–32, 37–38 (V–I or B–E). Play the V chord more loudly than the i or I most times, and with varying degrees of intensity. You can also use *accelerando* to enhance tension en route to each V, and *ritardando* as that chord resolves to the tonic.

How would you characterize the texture shown in the score—and how should that inform your interpretation? The texture is fairly static; there are few slurs, but you can use tone-color changes to add contrast. For example, you might play *sul tasto* (picking closer to the fingerboard) for the E-minor portions and more *ponticello* (closer to the bridge) for those in E major.

What is the form and how can you distinguish the sections? “Romanza” has a simple structure: a 16-bar A section (beginning in measure 1) and a B section (bar 18) of the

same length, with an overall scheme of A–A–B–B–A. The E-minor A section is a bit melancholy, while the E-major B section brings optimism and light. So, play B louder than A, and don’t be afraid to push the tempo a little. Because of the joyful brightness of the B section, when the piece returns to E minor, play it a bit more sadly and darkly than at the beginning, and slow down a bit as you come to the terminal bar.

3 MAKE IT MELODIC

The real quest for an expressive, beautiful, and moving performance lies in dealing well with the melody. Being aware of and interested in the melody can start with working in new ways of practicing:

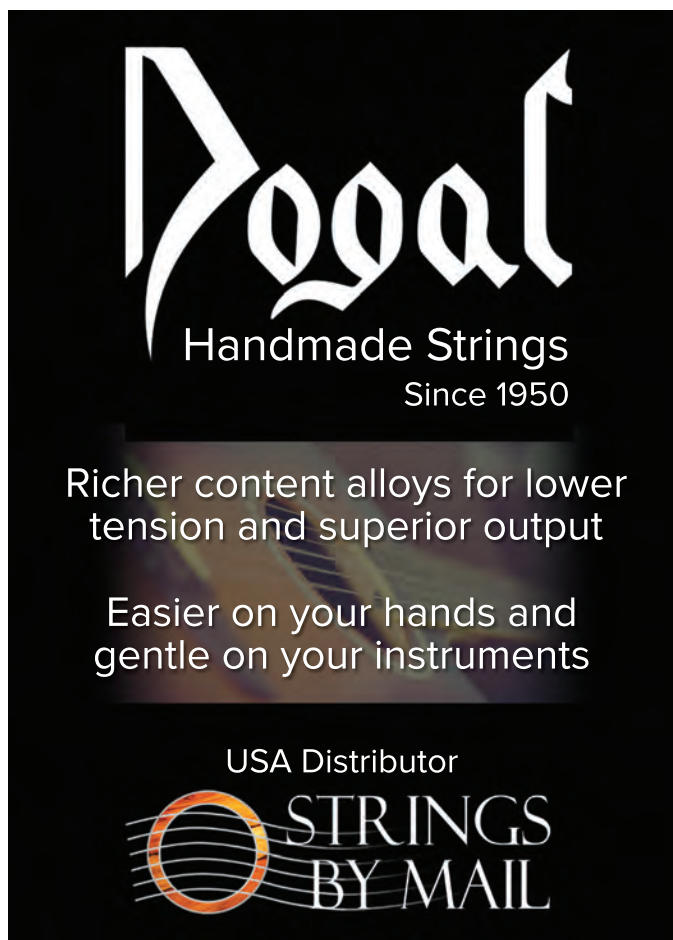
- Play the melody alone, without the accompaniment.
- Sing it alone.
- Sing it alone, with the accompaniment.
- Play the accompaniment as block chords without melody. Identify them and memorize them.

- Play the accompaniment as block chords while singing the melody.
- Play all the parts while singing the melody.
- Play all the parts together.

The most important thing you can do in the above work is to play the accompaniment much quieter than the melody. Your natural inclination might be the other way around—to play the melody louder than the accompaniment. That’s better than not differentiating the voices at all, but it will limit your dynamic and expressive range.

Now you know what I know about how to make a beautiful, expressive, and logical interpretation. It’s a challenging road, but well worth it. Go make some beautiful music, and I will, too.

Michael Chapdelaine is the only guitarist to have ever won first prize in both prestigious classical (GFA International Classical Guitar Competition) and fingerstyle (National Fingerstyle Championship) competitions. He was a professor of music at the University of New Mexico for 33 years and performs and teaches internationally. michaelchapdelaine.com



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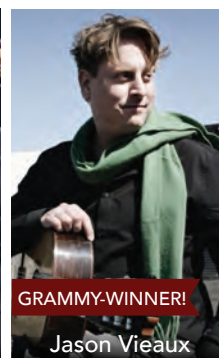
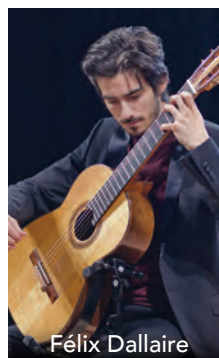
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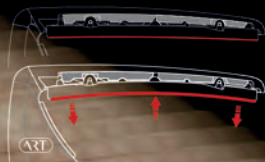
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Picking the Guitar

Tackling a classic steel-string instrumental

BY NICK ROSSI

Nick Lucas, né Dominic Nicholas Antonio Lucanese, was the first 20th-century guitar hero native to the United States. Born to Italian immigrants on August 22, 1897, in Newark, New Jersey, Lucas enjoyed a remarkable level of success throughout the 1920s and '30s. He was known as the “Crooning Troubadour” for his smooth, microphone-delivered vocals, backed by his guitar accompaniments, as heard on radio broadcasts, hit records, live performances, and film appearances. By the time of his peak popularity, at the onset of the Great Depression, his name was on everything from guitar method books to celluloid picks. Gibson even produced a Nick Lucas Special, with the guitarist's specifications of a wide fretboard and extra-deep body. Decades after, players as diverse as Merle Travis and Barney Kessel named him as a seminal influence.

Lucanese began by studying solfeggio with a neighborhood Sicilian teacher. At the urging of his older brother, an accordionist, he learned the mandolin and eventually adopted a more modern banjo-based American variant, the banjolin. Cutting his teeth on streetcars and at social functions, he added the guitar and tenor banjo to his arsenal.

In 1912, a teenaged Lucanese made his recording debut: a private sound reproduction experiment for none other than Thomas Edison, the great American inventor. Soon after that, the guitarist began performing on vaudeville stages, before working with bandleaders like Vincent Lopez, Ted Fio Rito, and Sam Lanin in hotel dance orchestras and cabaret combos using his adopted stage name, Nick Lucas. As ragtime transitioned to early jazz, Lucas absorbed elements of syncopated and improvised African-American music into his more traditional Italian-American string approach.

Shortly before he began recording the vocal records for Brunswick that spurred on his commercial success, Lucas cut two guitar instrumentals in 1922 for Pathé Records in New York. “Teasin’ the Frets,” backed with “Picking the Guitar,” ably demonstrated the modernistic style Lucas had developed. By that time, he had acquired as his main instrument



Nick Lucas with his signature model Gibson

a ladder-braced flattop Ciani guitar made in New York by Galiano. The instrument can be heard to great effect on both of these original recordings, as well as a 1923 rerecording for Brunswick. This time around, “Picking the Guitar” was placed on the A side of the single, which suggests its popularity.

Lucas returned to “Picking the Guitar” two more times in his career: another session for Brunswick in 1932 (captured for the first time via the then recently established electrical recording process) and in 1937 as part of a radio-only transcription disc session in Hollywood. These later recordings feature Lucas possibly playing an archtop, but he just as likely used one of his signature Gibsons. The steel-string that bore his name eventually became the only instrument he performed with, and “Picking the Guitar” stayed in his repertoire for decades.

A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

The 1932 Brunswick recording of “Picking the Guitar” is possibly the most well-known, having been featured on numerous compilations. By the early 1930s, the composition had shed some of its more ragged edges, while allowing Lucas room for improvisation on its fixed structure and melody. The form is one familiar in both the ragtime and Italian traditions, consisting of three strains: a main theme, notated here as the A section in the key of C and revisited throughout the piece; a second section in the relative key of A minor, indicated as section B; and section C, in F major. Before jumping into a work such as this, it can be helpful to map out the song in its entirety, either mentally or on paper. While you get acquainted with the piece, feel free to treat Fills 1–3 as optional, as they reflect the liberties Lucas had begun taking by the early 1930s.

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Overall, the rhythm of "Picking the Guitar" lies somewhere between ragtime of the early 1900s and the hot music of the 1920s. Guitar rag, a subgenre with which the tune shares some similarities, often recycled both popular and obscure themes long after they fell from favor with piano players. This piece covers such ground. The syncopation might be less obvious on paper than on the recording, but it is certainly an important facet of the music. That said, there is also a stiffness to the rhythm as originally played by Lucas, one which separates the music from much of 1920s jazz.

CHORD SHAPES AND DOWNSTROKES

Lucas's instrumental technique very much informs "Picking the Guitar." As seen in extant film and television performances, the guitarist favored full chord forms even when picking individual notes, often using unorthodox fingerings. Scan through the piece for single-note lines that belong to chord shapes, working through which notes are played. Having the full chord shapes at one's disposal allows for a broader palette when desired. It also helps manage unwanted ringing strings, beyond diligent muting with the picking hand's palm. Note, too, that there is piano accompaniment on the original recording. As

this arrangement is for solo guitar, it can be helpful to have fuller chords at your disposal.

Lucas, like most players in the Italian string virtuoso world, relied heavily on downstrokes. Doing the same will go a long way towards copying his distinctive sound, as this picking approach also affects rhythm and articulation. While contemporary guitarists tend to find alternating pick strokes helpful in playing more intricate lines at greater speed, I highly recommend that you use as many downstrokes as possible here. Start slowly, aiming for an even articulation of every note, particularly in arpeggios, such as those introduced in bars 5–6 and 41–43.

When it comes time to tackle the piece as a whole, again, start slowly and build up speed. Take solace that the piece works well at both moderate and brisk tempos, providing the individual player some headroom for development. Although not notated, *rubato* (expressively disregarding a strict tempo) can be used throughout, particularly at the end of a given section, just before launching back into the main theme of section A. Lucas altered his tempos over the years, with varying degrees of *rubato* from version to version.

Once you're comfortable with the entire piece at a moderate to bright tempo, you might explore the dynamics of the music and the Lucas

style. In addition to working in the optional fills and *rubato* sections previously mentioned, experiment with alternating between letting full chords ring and emphasizing single notes, using your own discretion and taste. And be sure to look out for a couple of fleeting but effective uses of vibrato, very common among Italian string players; the goal here is even and subtle, with just a slight change of pitch.

It should be noted that Lucas tended to play his lead lines closer to the guitar's bridge, which imparted the snappy attack heard on his recordings. Depending on the tone and timbre of your own instrument, picking about two to three inches in front of the bridge can yield some pleasing results that add a Lucas-approved quality to your performance.

Most important, you should enjoy the *guitaristics* of this piece. This is music written on guitar to be played on a guitar. The existing recordings hint at Lucas exploiting the instrument's strengths and attributes. One can easily imagine the legendary musician, who died in 1982 at the age of 84, continuing to play this piece late in life for friends.

Nick Rossi is a San Francisco-based guitarist, bandleader, writer, and historian with a long-time focus on traditional jazz and related American music. nickrossiguitar.com

PICKING THE GUITAR

MUSIC BY NICK LUCAS

♩ = 204

G7 E7 Am E Am E^{dim}7 F^{dim}7 G7

5 A G7 C E^{dim}7 C F^{dim}7

Cont. from p. 61

With Fill 1 (second and last times)
With Fill 2 (on D.S.)

9 **G7 D7 D7#5 G7 C**

13 **G7 C Ebdim7 C**

17 **A F#dim7 Adim7 G7 To Coda 1 To Coda 2 1. 2. C E7**

B 22 **Am Dm A7 G7 Dm6**

Fill 1

Fill 2



26

E F E

30

Am Dm A7 G7 Dm6

34

E

1. Am E7

2. D.S. al Coda 1 (no repeat)

Am G7

38

⊕ Coda 1

C

39

C F A Db7

42

F A Db7 C7 B7 C7

Cont. on p. 64

Cont. from p. 63

With Fill 3 (second time)

46

G7 C7 F A D \flat 7

50

F A D \flat 7 C7 B7 C7

54

1. G7 C7 F C7 G \flat 7 C7 2. G7 C7 F C7 F

58

G7

D.S. al Coda 2 \oplus Coda 2
C G7 C

Fill 3



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Powers of Three

Using triads to negotiate seventh chords

BY JANE MILLER

The first few chords that most acoustic guitar players learn are triads—the usual open-position chords like C major and A minor, G major and E minor, etc. Barre chords offer moveable forms of these chords, shapes that don't use any open strings and can be easily transposed all over the fretboard. As your guitar skills and ears develop, you might absorb some seventh chords, both in open position and moveable shapes.

In this Weekly Workout, you'll learn to use some three-note, three-string triads in ways that complement their related seventh chords. These easy-to-use chord forms can be very useful for adding parts as a second guitarist or with a bass player or pianist who is also providing a chord part. If you're a performing singer-songwriter, you can weave in and out of the triad forms to add interesting instrumental guitar breaks between verses.

These little chords are also an excellent gateway to improvising solos that make sense of the underlying chords of a song. The good news is that you probably already know a lot of the chords, and in this lesson, you'll find ways to repurpose them.

WEEK ONE

The D major triad on the first three strings, shown in bar 1 of **Example 1**, is a common example of a moveable chord form. This voicing is spelled A (fifth) D (root) F# (third). Since the fifth is the lowest note, it's a second-inversion triad. If you move that chord form up a whole step, or two frets, the note names change, but their relationships stay the same. As shown in bar 2, we have the notes B, E, and G#—respectively, the fifth, root, and third of an E major triad. To find a G chord with this shape, first identify the

third (B), and then move the chord shape to the seventh fret, where the note B will be on top. Instant G chord!

Staying with the three highest strings, you can find two more useful major triads—small versions of common barre chords. Start with a C barre chord in third position, as shown in the first measure of **Example 2**. This chord shape contains a root-position (1 3 5) C triad, spelled C E G, depicted in the second bar. Move the grip up two frets to play a D triad and two additional frets for an E triad.

Example 3 shows a third chord form on the top three strings—as indicated in bar 2, a first-inversion (third as the lowest note) F major triad, derived from the F barre chord at the first fret. The three notes of this compact shape are A (third), C (fifth), and F (root). Knowing that the root of the chord is the highest note will be helpful as you move this form around. For



WEEK 1

Example 1

Example 1 shows guitar chords and fingerings for D, E, G, C, C, D, and E. The chords are shown with fret numbers and fingerings (e.g., D: xxx132, E: xxx132, G: xxx132 7 fr., C: x12341, C: xxx341, D: xxx341 5 fr., E: xxx341 7 fr.). The guitar staff shows the corresponding notes and fingerings for the bass and treble clefs.

Example 2

WEEK 2

Example 3

Example 3 shows guitar chords and fingerings for F, F, Bb, Bb, Eb, F, Bb, Dm, Bbm, and Fm. The chords are shown with fret numbers and fingerings (e.g., F: 134211, F: xxx211, Bb: xxx211 6 fr., Bb: xxx211 6 fr., Eb: xxx341 6 fr., F: xxx132 5 fr., Bb: xxx211 6 fr., Dm: xxx241, Bbm: xxx321, Fm: xxx111). The guitar staff shows the corresponding notes and fingerings for the bass and treble clefs.

Example 4

Example 5

Example 6a

Example 6a shows guitar chords and fingerings for D, Dmaj7, D7, Dm7, Dm7b5, Ddim7, D, Dmaj7, D7, Dm7, Dm7b5, and Ddim7. The chords are shown with fret numbers and fingerings (e.g., D: xxx132, Dmaj7: xxx111, D7: xxx213, Dm7: xxx211, Dm7b5: xxx111, Ddim7: xxx102, D: xxx341 5 fr., Dmaj7: xxx241 5 fr., D7: xxx141 5 fr., Dm7: xxx132 5 fr., Dm7b5: xxx241 4 fr., Ddim7: xxx141 4 fr.). The guitar staff shows the corresponding notes and fingerings for the bass and treble clefs.

Example 6b

Example 6c

Example 6c shows guitar chords and fingerings for D, Dmaj7, D7, Dm7, Dm7b5, and Ddim7. The chords are shown with fret numbers and fingerings (e.g., D: xxx211 10 fr., Dmaj7: xxx321 9 fr., D7: xxx321 8 fr., Dm7: xxx341 8 fr., Dm7b5: xxx321 8 fr., Ddim7: xxx321 7 fr.). The guitar staff shows the corresponding notes and fingerings for the bass and treble clefs.

WEEKLY WORKOUT

instance, to play a B \flat triad, visualize the B \flat on string 1 and move the shape up to the sixth fret.

To get some extra mileage out of these triad forms, try mixing them up in a couple of common chord progressions. **Example 4** is a I-IV-V-I (B \flat -E \flat -F-B \flat) in the key of B \flat major. You'll find that these three-string forms are just as easy in this key as they are in any other and will be a perfect fit for harmonizing with another guitarist, pianist, or bassist. You can be creative with the rhythms, but take care to only play the three highest strings.

To access the minor counterparts to these major triads, simply lower the third of each

chord by one fret. **Example 5** shows Dm, B \flat m, and Fm triads. Compare these to their major relatives, and make sure you're comfortable with all of this week's chord shapes before moving on.

WEEK TWO

Let's bring some other chord types into the mix. **Example 6a** depicts the evolution of a D major triad into Dmaj7, D7, Dm7, Dm7 \flat 5, and Ddim7 chords. Notice that the root (D) is missing from the seventh chords, but that works, as the third and seventh are the defining notes of these chords. Also, check out how the sevenths can be viewed as triads: For instance, Dmaj7 (D F \sharp A C \sharp) = F \sharp m (F \sharp A C \sharp); Dm7 (D F A C) = F (F A C); Dm7 \flat 5 (D F A \flat C) = Fm (F A \flat C); and Ddim7 (D F A \flat C \flat) = Fdim (F A \flat C \flat). And that D triad (D F \sharp A) can be used to negotiate a Bm7 (B D F \sharp A) chord. These concepts are reinforced in **Examples 6b-c**, which move Ex. 6a's progression to other positions.

Now try out some of these small chord forms in a progression with a mix of major and minor seventh chords. **Example 7a** is a I-vi-ii-v (Dmaj7-Bm7-Em7-Am7) progression

in D major, played with common barre chords, while **Examples 7b-d** illustrate different positions for playing the same progression. When you work through each example, you might like to play a bass note for yourself first, so that you can best hear how the chords sound in context, or create a simple backing track of the full chords to use as you play the smaller forms.

WEEK THREE

As you saw in last week's exercises, a dominant seventh chord played on the first three

Beginners' Tip #1

Play the familiar open D chord without the root on the open D string. Practice this—as well as the small F and C chords—with and without a pick to get used to the control needed to play three strings only.

Beginners' Tip #2

Try the D-Dm moves in half-step increments for extra practice playing the changes in time. Do this at frets 2/3, 5/7, and 10/11, or all three inversions of D on the top three strings. Move up or down the fretboard as high and low as you can reach, and name the chords as you go.




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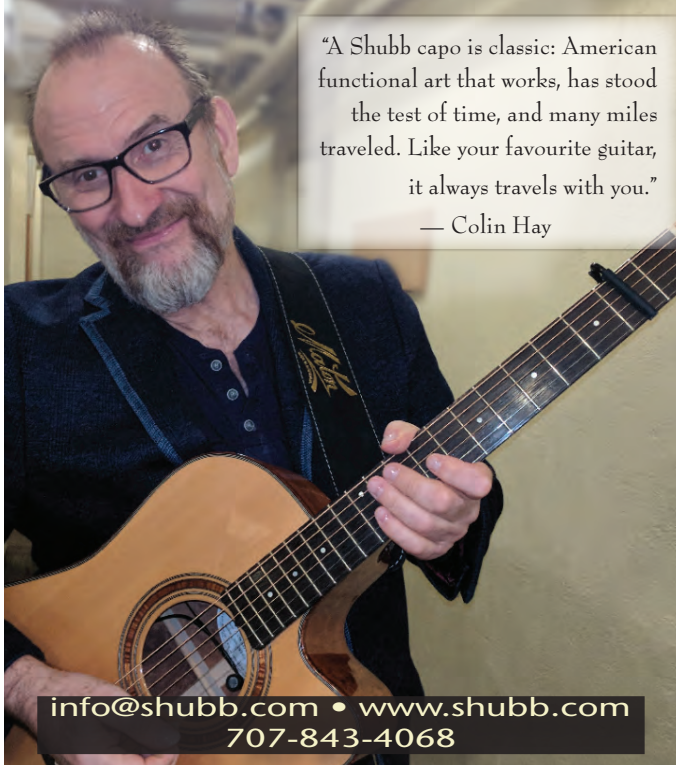



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Example 7a

Diagram for Example 7a showing guitar chords and fret positions:

- Dmaj7 (x13241) 5 fr.
- Bm7 (131111) 7 fr.
- Em7 (x13121) 7 fr.
- Am7 (131111) 5 fr.
- Dmaj7 (xxx111)
- Bm7 (xxx132)
- Em7 (xxx211)
- Am7 (xxx341)

Staff notation and fret positions for Example 7a:

Staff	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
T	5	7	7	5	2	2	3
A	7	7	8	5	2	3	3
B	7	7	7	5	2	2	5
B	5	7	9	5			

Example 7b

Example 7c

Diagram for Example 7c showing guitar chords and fret positions:

- Dmaj7 (xxx241) 5 fr.
- Bm7 (xxx341) 5 fr.
- Em7 (xxx132) 7 fr.
- Am7 (xxx211) 8 fr.
- Dmaj7 (xxx321) 9 fr.
- Bm7 (xxx211) 10 fr.
- Em7 (xxx341) 10 fr.
- Am7 (xxx132) 12 fr.

Staff notation and fret positions for Example 7c:

Staff	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
T	5	5	7	8	9	10	12
A	7	7	8	8	10	10	13
B	6	7	7	9	11	11	12
B							

Example 7d

WEEK 3

Example 8

Diagram for Example 8 showing guitar chords and fret positions:

- G7 (xxx321)
- G7 (xxx213) 6 fr.
- G7 (xxx131) 10 fr.
- Gmaj7 (xxx321)
- Em7 (xxx211)
- Am7 (xxx341)
- D7 (xxx131) 5 fr.

Staff notation and fret positions for Example 8:

Staff	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
T	1	7	10	2	3	3	5
A	3	6	12	3	3	5	7
B	4	7	10	4	4	5	5
B							

Example 9a

Example 9b

Diagram for Example 9b showing guitar chords and fret positions:

- Gmaj7 (xxx111) 7 fr.
- Em7 (xxx132) 7 fr.
- Am7 (xxx211) 8 fr.
- D7 (xxx321) 8 fr.
- Gmaj7 (xxx241) 10 fr.
- Em7 (xxx341) 10 fr.
- Am7 (xxx132) 12 fr.
- D7 (xxx213) 13 fr.

Staff notation and fret positions for Example 9b:

Staff	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
T	7	7	8	8	10	10	12
A	7	8	8	10	12	12	13
B	7	7	9	11	11	12	14
B							

Example 9c

strings, omitting the root, is the same as a diminished triad. For instance, take a G7 chord (G B D F), remove the root (G), and you're left with Bdim (B D F). **Example 8** shows three ways to play G7, each of which can each also be seen as an inversion of a B diminished triad. To best hear these voicings as belonging to a G7 chord, play the third-fret G on string 6 before each chord.

The ever-popular I–vi–ii–V chord progression, the backbone of standards like “I’ve Got Rhythm” and “Blue Moon,” is a good set of chords to use for hearing the dominant seventh chord (V) resolve to a major triad or major seventh chord (I). **Examples 9a–c** show three ways of playing

this progression on repeat, which is important so that you can hear the V–I resolution.

Dominant seventh chords don’t always resolve to the I chord in any given key. They sometimes move to other dominant sevenths in a cycle of fourths, as in the bridge of “I’ve Got Rhythm.” In **Example 10a**, notice how the triads are placed as closely as possible to each other, using a technique known as voice leading. This is an efficient way to connect chords and is helpful for seeing how to connect a melodic thread through a progression. **Example 10b** is one way to create a melody using those triads.

WEEK FOUR

It’s time to combine the various chord qualities into a song form. Again, it is good practice to create a backing track for yourself to practice the upper structures of the chords in time and harmonic context. My etude “Minor Details” (**Example 11**) can be played in three parts: larger chord forms in open position or barre chords, the three-string triads that you now know as part of the larger chords, and a melody derived from the triad forms. Study and practice this melody to get a sense of how

the triad shapes can provide a template for improvising solos that follow the chord progression. After memorizing triad shapes with respect to related seventh chords, you’ll not only be comping with taste and brevity but will have a reliable map for single-note solos, whether composed or improvised.

Jane Miller, a guitar professor at Berklee College of Music, has performed and presented master classes around the world. Miller is the author of Introduction to Jazz Guitar and Triads for the Improvising Guitarist (both published by Berklee Press/Hal Leonard). Her latest album of original music, Boats, is available at janemillergroup.com.

Beginners' Tip #3

Break the I–vi–ii–V progression into smaller parts and practice two chords at a time until you feel ready to string them together. Remember to include the V–I chord change, which happens on the repeats.

Beginners' Tip #4

Slow down! Practicing at a more relaxed tempo will help you form the chord changes in time, right on the beats. Gradually increase your speed using a metronome, and you’ll be able to measure your progress.

Example 10a

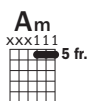


Example 10b



WEEK 4

Example 11
“Minor Details”





Chord diagrams and fretboard positions for the first system:

- E7** (xxx131) 7 fr.
- F7** (xxx131) 8 fr.
- E7** (xxx131) 7 fr.
- Am** (xxx111) 5 fr.
- Dm7** (xxx132) 5 fr.
- Am7** (xxx211) 8 fr.

Chord diagrams and fretboard positions for the second system:

- Fmaj7** (xxx241) 8 fr.
- Dm7** (xxx341) 8 fr.
- Cmaj7** (xxx111) 12 fr.
- Cmaj7** (xxx321) 7 fr.
- Am7** (xxx341)

Chord diagrams and fretboard positions for the third system:

- Bm7 \flat 5** (xxx241) 5 fr.
- Bm7 \flat 5** (xxx321) 5 fr.
- E7** (xxx321) 10 fr.
- F7** (xxx131) 8 fr.
- E7** (xxx131) 7 fr.
- Am** (xxx111) 5 fr.

TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Making the match between triads and seventh chords can be seen more clearly by applying theory. Rather than thinking of the triad members in terms of their usual function (root, third, or fifth), begin to view the notes as they relate to the seventh chords. The A, D, and F (5, 1, and \flat 3) of a Dm triad can be seen as the 7, 3, and 5 of a B \flat maj7 chord. Understanding the role that the first-string note plays in the seventh chord will make transposing up and down the fretboard easy. For example, knowing that the highest note of this B \flat maj7 form is the fifth (F) will help to get to Fmaj7 right in time. As the fifth of the latter chord is C, simply slide that same chord form up to eighth position.

Chord diagrams and fretboard positions for the fourth system:

- B \flat maj7** (xxx241)
- Fmaj7** (xxx241) 8 fr.



Rocky Mountain High

John Denver's loving tribute to his adopted state of Colorado

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

Colorado has inspired a good number of songs, but few are as evocative of the Centennial State and its majestic elevations as John Denver's "Rocky Mountain High." This folk-rock gem, which Denver co-wrote with the singer/songwriter and guitarist Mike Taylor (who also performed on the original 1972 recording), spent years as an unofficial anthem for Colorado before becoming the official state song in 2007.

Denver played "Rocky Mountain High" in dropped-D tuning (from standard, the low E string tuned down a step, to D) in the key of D major, with a second-fret capo transposing the song to E. He started the song with an interesting riff, shown below in notation, in which he decorated chord shapes with single-note embellishments. This figure also occurs in the verses. If you use the indicated fingering for the D chord, then you'll need to hammer on the notes at fret 4 with your fourth finger. If it feels awkward to use that digit, though, try fretting the D chord with a barre at fret 2 across strings 1–3 and your second finger on the D at string 2, fret 3. That way your third finger will be available for those fourth-fret hammer-ons.



For the Em7, G, and A7sus4 chords, Denver used a neat trick: Instead of three separate chord grips, he used a single shape—the second and third fingers at parallel frets, slid along the bottom two strings. Not only does this make things easier to play than with stock open chord voicings, it lends harmonic color.

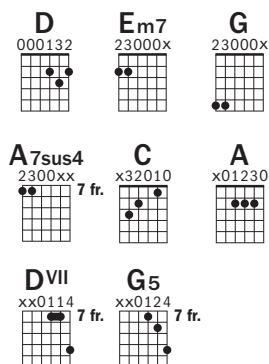
In another nice chordal move, Denver opts for some alternate voicings for the D and G chords in the chorus, fingered on the top three strings in seventh position. That gives this section of the song a little emotional lift, which is only fitting given the context. **AC**

ROCKY MOUNTAIN HIGH

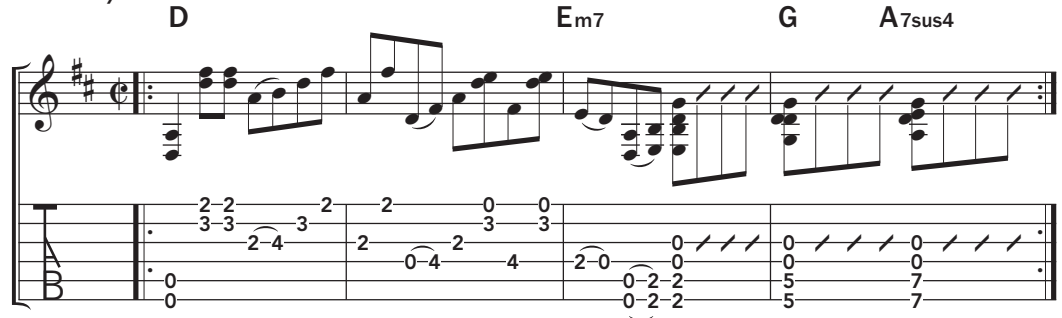
WORDS AND MUSIC BY JOHN DENVER

Tuning: D A D G B E, Capo II

Chords



Intro/Verse Riff



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Intro

D **Em7** **G** **A7sus4**
D **Em7** **G** **A7sus4**

1. **D** **Em7** **C** **A**
He was born in the summer of his 27th year
D **Em7** **G** **A7sus4**
Coming home to a place he'd never been before
D **Em7** **C** **A**
He left yesterday behind him; you might say he was born again
D **Em7** **G** **A7sus4**
You might say he found a key for every door

2. **D** **Em7** **C**
When he first came to the mountains his life was far away
A **D** **Em7** **G** **A7sus4**
On the road and hanging by a song
D **Em7** **C** **A**
But the string's already broken and he doesn't really care
D **Em7** **G** **A7sus4**
It keeps changing fast and it don't last for long

Chorus

G **A** **D**
But the Colorado Rocky Mountain high
G **A** **D^{vii}**
I've seen it raining fire in the sky
G **A** **D** **G5**
The shadow from the starlight is softer than a lullaby
D **Em7**
Rocky Mountain high (Colorado)
G **A7sus4** **D** **Em7** **G** **A7sus4**
Rocky Mountain high (High in Colorado)

3. **D** **Em7** **C** **A**
He climbed cathedral mountains; he saw silver clouds below
D **Em7** **G** **A7sus4**
He saw everything as far as you can see
D **Em7** **C** **A**
And they say that he got crazy once, and he tried to touch the sun
D **Em7** **G** **A7sus4**
And he lost a friend but kept the memory

4. **D** **Em7** **C** **A**
Now he walks in quiet solitude, the forests and the streams
D **Em7** **G** **A7sus4**
Seeking grace in every step he takes
D **Em7** **C** **A**
His sight has turned inside himself to try and understand
D **Em7** **G** **A7sus4**
The serenity of a clear blue mountain lake

Chorus 2

G **A** **D**
And the Colorado Rocky Mountain high
G **A** **D^{vii}**
I've seen it raining fire in the sky
G **A** **D** **G5**
Talk to God and listen to the casual reply
D **Em7**
Rocky Mountain high (Colorado)
G **A7sus4** **D** **Em7** **G** **A7sus4**
Rocky Mountain high (High in Colorado)

5. **D** **Em7** **C** **A**
Now his life is full of wonder, but his heart still knows some fear
D **Em7** **G** **A7sus4**
Of a simple thing he cannot comprehend
D **Em7** **C** **A**
While they try to tear the mountains down to bring in a couple more
D **Em7** **G** **A7sus4**
More people, more scars upon the land

Chorus 3

G **A** **D**
And the Colorado Rocky Mountain high
G **A** **D^{vii}**
I've seen it raining fire in the sky
G **A** **D** **G5**
I know he'd be a poorer man if he never saw an eagle fly
D
Rocky Mountain high
G **A** **D**
Colorado Rocky Mountain high
G **A** **D**
I've seen it raining fire in the sky
G **A** **D** **G5**
Friends around the campfire and everybody's high
(G5)
Rocky Mountain

Outro (repeat and fade)

D **Em7** **G** **A7sus4**
High (High in Colorado) Rocky Mountain



PRINCE ESTATE/WARNER BROS.

I Feel for You

How to play a newly released acoustic demo by a 20-year-old Prince

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

It might seem incongruous to see “I Feel for You,” a song made popular by the R&B singer Chaka Khan in the mid-1980s, in this magazine. Sure, it’s a classic, but there’s nothing even faintly acoustic about Khan’s version of this Prince tune, with its dominant synth and drum programming. Prince himself had recorded the song for his 1979 self-titled sophomore album, and a newly released demo, which is quite the revelation, finds him singing it while accompanying himself on a steel-string.

Prince, the musical force who died in 2016 at the age of 57, was known to break into pyrotechnical solos on the electric guitar, but the “I Feel for You” demo shows more subtle aspects of the artist’s prodigious command of music, particularly his grasp of fretboard harmony. The song’s fancy chords—13ths and ninths, more of what you’d expect to find on a jazz outing than

a pop tune—lend a chic air to the proceedings.

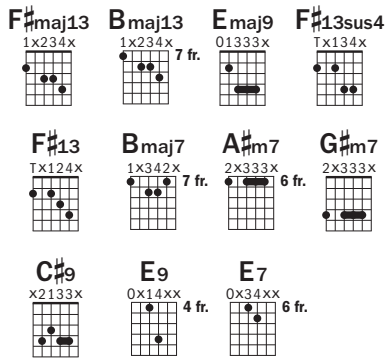
If you’re unfamiliar with the chord grips shown here, I’d recommend taking the time to get to know them, as they’re useful voicings to have in your vocabulary. Try the suggested fingerings, but if any are uncomfortable, feel free to adjust them. For instance, on the $F\sharp 13sus4-F\sharp 13$ move, if it’s awkward to fret the sixth string with your thumb, try using your first and second fingers on strings 6 and 4 and barre strings 2 and 3 with your fourth finger for the $F\sharp 13sus4$ chord; keep your first and second fingers in place for the $F\sharp 13$, but play the notes on strings 3 and 2 with your third and fourth fingers, respectively.

Prince’s strumming on the demo is so funky that it practically defies notation, but you can approximate his general approach by moving your picking hand in a continuous, up-and-down

16th-note motion (even when you’re not coming into contact with the strings) and muting the strings with your fretting fingers at strategic points, indicated in the notation and tablature as Xs. For added rhythmic intensity, try slapping the strings percussively with your picking hand on beats 2 and 4.

The four-bar transcription here shows what Prince plays in the first four bars of the demo—a rhythmic figure that also loops throughout the verse. Note that Prince sometimes mutes the 13th ($D\sharp$ on string 2, fret 4) on the $F\sharp maj13$ chord. Also, check out the R&B-style fill that Prince plays at the end of the figure, which he never does quite the same way twice on the demo. Stop the fourth- and sixth-fret notes with your first and third fingers, respectively, but if you find the fill gets in the way of the groove for you, just omit it and keep strumming. **AC**

Chords



Intro/Verse Pattern

F#maj13 **Bmaj13**

*Strum/Pick: ▢ V ▢ V ▢ ▢ V ▢ ▢ V ▢ V ▢ ▢ V ▢

* ▢ = down; V = up

Emaj9 **F#maj13**

Intro

F#maj13 Bmaj13 Emaj9 F#maj13
F#maj13 Bmaj13 Emaj9 F#maj13

- F#maj13 Bmaj13**
 1. Baby, baby, when you look at me
 Emaj9 F#maj13
 I get a warm feeling inside
 F#maj13 Bmaj13
 Sugar, sugar, won't you rescue me
 Emaj9 F#maj13
 Take me for a ride

Pre-Chorus

F#13sus4 F#13
 Ain't gonna lie to you, baby
 Bmaj7 A#m7 G#m7
 It's mainly a physical thing
 F#13sus4 F#13
 This feeling that I got for you, baby
 Bmaj7 A#m7 G#m7 C#9
 Makes me feel this funk, oh yeah

Chorus

- F#13sus4 F#13**
 I feel for you
 E9 E7
 I think I love you
 F#13sus4 F#13
 I feel for you
 E9 E7
 I think I love you
 2. Baby, baby, when I lay with you
 Emaj9 F#maj13
 There's no place I'd rather be
 F#maj13 Bmaj13
 I can't believe, I can't believe it's true
 Emaj9 F#maj13
 The things that you do to me

Repeat Pre-Chorus and Chorus

Interlude (with Pre-Chorus progression)

Ad lib vamp (repeat Chorus progression as desired)



Charlie Rauh



JOEY LUSTERMAN

Fanø/Black Sea Dress

A pair of aphoristic miniatures from Charlie Rauh

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

Medieval and Renaissance music might seem worlds apart from the American folk tradition, but New York-based guitarist and composer Charlie Rauh draws from them equally on his latest album, *Hiraeth* (Destiny Records), a set of solo acoustic pieces. “I love the sound of 12th–15th century music and certainly channel my conception of that,” he says. “At the same time, I feel very connected to Appalachian music, having spent most of my life living in the South.”

The notation here is based on the studio recordings of two selections from *Hiraeth*—“Fanø” and “Black Sea Dress”—both of which Rauh played when he recently filmed a video for AG’s *Sessions* series. The former composition was inspired by Rauh’s visit to the small island of Fanø, off the coast of southwestern Denmark,

during a European tour; the latter by “The Sentence,” in which the great Ukrainian poet Anna Akhmatova chronicled her personal tragedies during the Stalin regime.

“Fanø” and “Black Sea Dress” evoke decidedly contrasting moods, but they share a similar approach to harmony, in which Rauh pits fretted notes against the ringing open strings to find both peaceful and tense—and often uncommon—voicings. Both compositions are also striking in their brevity (each one is just over a minute long) and unhurriedness. “My preference for slowness and free pacing has a lot to do with the influence of poetry, particularly Emily and Anne Brontë’s work, on my music,” Rauh says. “I try to compose music in the same way I would write

a poem: brief but not rushed; distilled but very much complete.”

In terms of technique, Rauh plays both pieces with hybrid picking—using the plectrum and middle and ring fingers—an approach he adopted when living in Nashville and being exposed to the hot pickers on Music Row. “You could say I attempt to combine a country/folk right hand with a sort of early music/classical left hand,” he says.

While hybrid picking lends a certain definition and crispness, especially on the bass notes, straight fingerpicking will work equally well on the two pieces. Whichever technique you use, make sure to bring out the melody, which is seen in the up-stemmed notes, while letting everything ring together as long as possible. But most important, take things slowly and lean into the music. **AG**

"Fanø"

Chords: A6, Bm(add9), F#m, Bm(add9), F#m, Bm(add9)

let ring throughout

Chords: F#m, F#m9(maj7), Em, Em(add9), G7/B, Cadd9, F#11

1. E5(#4), A6

2. Em(maj7)

rit.

The musical score for "Fanø" is written for guitar. It begins with a treble clef and a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The first system contains six measures of music, each with a chord label above it: A6, Bm(add9), F#m, Bm(add9), F#m, and Bm(add9). The bass line is indicated by "let ring throughout". The second system continues with chords F#m, F#m9(maj7), Em, Em(add9), G7/B, Cadd9, and F#11. The third system shows two first endings: the first ending leads back to the beginning of the first system, and the second ending leads to a final measure marked "rit.". The score includes detailed fretting and fingering for both hands.

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"Black Sea Dress"

Chords: Eb, G, Cm, Ab(#4), Gaug, G, F9, Cm, G5, G, C5

let ring throughout

Chords: Eb, Cm(b6), G, G7, Csus4, C, Abmaj7#5, Fsus2, Cm, G, C5

The musical score for "Black Sea Dress" is written for guitar. It begins with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats (Bb and Eb). The first system contains nine measures of music, each with a chord label above it: Eb, G, Cm, Ab(#4), Gaug, G, F9, Cm, G5, G, and C5. The bass line is indicated by "let ring throughout". The second system continues with chords Eb, Cm(b6), G, G7, Csus4, C, Abmaj7#5, Fsus2, Cm, G, and C5. The score includes detailed fretting and fingering for both hands.

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Stealin'

A jug-band classic, popularized by the Grateful Dead and others

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER



Maurice Tani

In the 1960s, many folk, blues, and rock musicians helped introduce old and sometimes forgotten gems to youthful audiences. A good case in point is “Stealin’ Stealin’,” which was first recorded by the New Orleans jazz musician Clarence Williams in 1921 and which saw a definitive version in a 1928 recording by the Memphis Jug Band. “Stealin’,” as it’s alternatively titled, became a folk/pop standard through interpretations by the Grateful Dead, Bob Dylan, and others.

Like many folk and pop songs, “Stealin’” is built from the I, IV, and V chords—C, F, and G5,

respectively, in this arrangement’s key of C major—with the vi chord (Am7) also thrown in. This notation conveys what singer-songwriter Maurice Tani plays in the accompanying video on AG’s website. (Note that Tani’s vocal line is somewhat simplified in the notation, to make it more playable for guitarists of all abilities.)

In his accompaniment, Tani demonstrates an important but often overlooked concept: when strumming cowboy chords, you don’t need to play notes on all of the strings. For instance, Tani omits the first string on all

four chords, and this discourages sonic clutter. He also uses efficient fingerings, which make it easier to switch between chords—in bars 13 and 18, he plays the Am7 chord simply by removing his third finger from the C chord shape.

As for the picking hand, Tani plays a basic boom-chuck pattern, with the occasional walk-up, shown below. Note that for the C chord, you’ll need to move your third finger between the third fret on strings 5 and 6. Also, be sure to maintain a loose and relaxed strum throughout, for a kind of swinging feel. **AG**

STEALIN'

TRADITIONAL

Intro/Basic Strumming Pattern

*Outro

Chord diagrams for C (x3201x) and F (T3421x) are shown above the staff. The notation includes a (walk-up) section and a section marked etc. The bass line is indicated by numbers 0, 2, 3, 1, 3, 2, 3, 0, 2, 3.

*Play in bars 20–21.

Verse

Chord diagram for C (x3201x) is shown above the staff. The notation includes a verse section with lyrics: 1. Now put your arms a - round me like a cir - cle 'round the sun. I want wom - an that I'm lov - in', she's just my height and size. She's a. The bass line is indicated by numbers 0, 2, 0, 2, 0, 2, 3, 2, 0, 2, 0, 2, 3, 1.

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F T3421x **C** x3201x

3 3 3 3

you to love me, Ma - ma, like my ea - sy ri - der done. } If you don't be - lieve I love you, look what a
mar-ried wom - an, come to see me some-times. }

2 0 3 1 3 1 3 1 3 1 3 1 3 0 0 0 0 3 2 3

6 3 3 3

fool I've been. ____ If you don't be - lieve I'm sink - ing, look what a hole I'm ____ in. ____

0 3 2 0 0 0 0 3 2 0 0 0 0 3 1 0 3

Chorus

C x3201x **C7** x3241x **F** T3421x

9

Steal-in', ____ steal-in', ____ pret - ty ma - ma, don't you tell on ____ me. I'm steal -

2 0 2 2 0 2 0 2 0 3 3 0 3 0 2 3 2 2

C x3201x **Am7** x0201x **G5** 3x004x **C** x3201x

13

- in' back ____ to my same ____ old used ____ to be. ____ 2. Ah, the

0 3 0 2 0 3 0 3 2 0

C x3201x **Am7** x0201x **G5** 3x004x **C** x3201x

17

I'm steal - in' back ____ to my same ____ old used to be. ____

2 2 0 3 0 2 0 3 0 0 3



These Grand Ole Opry musicians could choose to use any gear on the planet—but they all choose Schertler.

From left: Kerry Marx, Jimmy Capps, Larry Paxton, Danny Parks, Michael Noble, Mark Burchfield, Todd Cook, Kris Wilkinson and Wanda Vick

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NICK MILLEVOI

Steel-String City

Pittsburgh-based luthier Raymond Morin and his Pleinview-branded guitars

BY NICK MILLEVOI

Pleinview Guitars keeps a particularly low profile. The company doesn't have a website or social media presence, so if you want to see in-progress shots of its instruments, you'll have to follow luthier Raymond Morin's personal Instagram page, which focuses primarily on his solo guitar project, Jagtime Millionaire. This level of online mystery has made things all the more compelling. Having seen Pleinviews in the hands of such deep players as Steve Gunn, Nathan Salsburg, and Ross Hammond, I knew there must be something special about the guitars.

Pleinview's reputation has spread predominately through word of mouth, an approach to marketing that has worked well for Morin and his assistant, Adam Rousseau. Despite an output of fewer than ten guitars per year, Morin has been able to use his connections to the underground guitar scene to get his instruments into

the collections of the aforementioned heavy hitters. "Basically, for the foreseeable future, anyone who buys a Pleinview is in on the ground floor," Morin explains.

Acoustic Music Works, a fretted instrument boutique in Pittsburgh, functions as somewhat of an incubator for Pleinview, which has become the store's in-house brand. It wasn't until Morin began working there in 2012, at the age of 35, that he decided to take a two-week immersion course at the Whetstone School of Lutherie. Soon after that, he began building guitars in the back of the shop. "When I started here, Steve just let me run wild back here," Morin says of owner Steve Miklas. "He just said, 'Do whatever you want.'" And, just like that, Pleinview Guitars had not only a home but access to a local customer base.

Acoustic Music Works is what brought me to visit Morin and talk about his work. In October

2019, I was scheduled to perform at the store and took the opportunity to play some Pleinviews. I'd previously only encountered one, a small jumbo, in person. Despite having played that guitar informally for just a few minutes, it remained in my memory, and I was eagerly awaiting another occasion to have some more time with these guitars.

The morning after my gig at Acoustic Music Works, I caught up with Morin and had a chance to try out three of his guitars. Two were what he calls his Looky Loo models, clearly inspired by Collings' Waterloo series, but available with custom specs, such as different tonewood choices and the use of pore filler. Just as the similarities are apparent in aesthetics and construction, so too are the differences in tonal profile—Pleinviews tend to have more low end and less punchy midrange than their Waterloo equivalents. They're

guitars with a familiar feel but with a distinct sound that make it hard to argue with Salsburg, who has called his the “littlest and loudest guitar I’ve ever called my own.”

For the occasion, one of Morin’s clients lent a swanky Pleinview SJ purchased in 2017. Featuring a German spruce top and Oregon myrtle back and sides with deep, multi-dimensional figuring, it really stood out alongside offerings by Collings, Bourgeois, and other high-end makers as one of the nicest guitars in the store. The SJ’s quick responsiveness, deep bass, warm but punchy tone, and easy playability have left an impression I expect to be thinking about for quite some time. While I played this and other guitars, Morin and I spoke about his life in lutherie.

How did you get your start as a builder?

I used to manage an art supply store around the corner, and I would come down here on my lunch break and just started hanging out. I had what I thought was the best guitar ever at the time, a Larrivée OM. I knew that there was stuff that was more expensive, but I didn’t really understand how you could make a better guitar than that.

Steve, the store’s owner, asked, “What do you play?” I said, “A Larrivée.” He’s like, “Oh, that’s a good guitar.” And I said, “Well, what is this stuff, Collings? Five thousand dollars? Is it that much better?” He’s like, “Play it. You tell me.” So I just started getting it. I heard how high-performance they were as far as giving back what you put into them.

So, Steve took a shine to me. I think I just asked the right questions. He saw the moment where I got it—he liked that. And then one day he said, “I was talking to my wife, and she thinks I should steal you away from your other job.” I had already decided that I would like to learn to build guitars. When I knew I was going to get the job I thought, “Well, this will definitely help me,” and that’s why I started.

I’m sure it was a resource to work here and have access to all these instruments.

You have all these great guitars to study, and the value that it’s added to the shop has been really interesting. When people come into this room and see the woodshop and all the molds, they get an extra level of excitement, like, “Whoa! Do you guys build guitars?”

I get to take the customers back and show them the instruments in pieces. It really fascinates people. At the end of the day, other than just the satisfaction of making something and being a craftsman, I also enjoy the authority that I feel when I’m describing a guitar or what different woods do.



COURTESY OF PLEINVIEW GUITARS

How did Pleinview start and where does the name come from?

After I built four or five guitars on my own, I immediately had people wanting to buy them, which was weird. I had this guitar, number one, and I’d gotten back from Whetstone. I was meeting a friend of mine at a bar who I hadn’t seen in a while, and I brought it. This woman emerged from the shadows and was like, “You built that? Will you make me one?” I said, “Let me learn what I’m doing first, but we’ll stay in touch.” She ended up actually getting my sixth guitar.

A friend of mine was going through a really hard time, and I said to Adam Rousseau, who does Pleinview with me, “I’m thinking of building this guy a guitar, and it would be really cool if it came from both of us,” because Adam, through this mutual friend, was the first person that I met when I moved to Pittsburgh.

He said, “Sure.” I suggested, “Leading up to that guitar, do you want to help me with these couple other ones that I’m working on just so you get your sea legs?” Adam was here just like clockwork twice a week, every week, and we started working. He was very good,

easy to direct, and with natural dimensional sensibility. He’s very good at carving, anything sculptural.

In any case, we made the guitar for our friend as a total surprise, and he was floored. By that time, Adam had helped me with a few guitars, and I said, “If I start a brand, do you want to be in on it?” We kicked around names for a little while, like a band choosing its name. I said, “I’m thinking like Andrew Carnegie, captains of industry,” and Adam suggested Daniel Plainview from [the 2007 film] *There Will Be Blood*. We had another friend who came in to help us with some graphics and he said, “You guys are both French Canadian, right? What about Pleinview, like *plein air* painting?”

Referencing captains of industry, like Andrew Carnegie, ties into local history.

That was when Pittsburgh was the center of wealth in the whole world.

What does being here in Pittsburgh mean to you and the brand?

Pittsburgh doesn’t have any pretension about it. When I came here from Boston, I very quickly realized you can do anything you want,

everything is cheaper, you'll be able to get it together, but nobody is necessarily going to give a shit. It's not really a cool-based scene around here. You just need the wherewithal to do whatever you want and go deeper than anybody expects you to, and then you become known. If you're good at it, you'll have work.

These two Looky Loo models are an homage to Collings' Waterloo line. Can you tell me about your connection to those guitars?

A year after I started working here, Steve [Miklas] and I were in Austin visiting the Collings shop. After we did the tour and picked out some wood for some mandolins, Bill [Collings] walked out with an X-braced Waterloo and a ladder-braced one and he's like, "Tell me what you think." I sat there for 25 minutes playing the Waterloos. And Bill's just listening and asking, "What do you think? What do you like better?" It was so cool.

When Collings announced the Waterloo line, we presold 25 or some crazy number. Then when our very first ones showed up, I observed everything I could about them and built myself one. And that's the one [points to a Looky Loo guitar]. I actually asked [Sales Manager] Angela at Collings if she'd send me a Waterloo pickguard. She said, "For your fake Waterloo?" I said, "Yeah," and she's like, "No." [Laughs.]

How do you differentiate yourself from that with these guitars?

I don't. There's nothing I do that you can't get somewhere else. I think it is just a bunch of those boxes getting checked off: this guy plays guitar; this guy likes like artsy music; this guy doesn't do a lot of building. So when I build, I'm pretty darn focused on it.

As far as your Pleinview clientele, how do people find you?

It's probably about half customers at the store who are already buying nice guitars and take the opportunity to get something custom ordered. The underground guitar scene is amazing. Someone like Nathan Salsburg is one of my favorite guitar players, so when he says, "Let's get it going," it's awesome.

I imagine a lot of connections are from meeting people through touring with your own music.

The way it connects is that, as opposed to most of the other guitar players I know, not many of them are interested in guitars. They're interested in making music, and I get it. But I was always particularly interested in guitars. I can make my kind of music on whatever guitar, but I thought it was fun to choose your tools. So

people started turning to me with guitar questions because of my knowledge about guitars. When I got my Larrivée, that was an exotic guitar to a lot of my friends.

When I started building, it became became an opportunity knocks thing where somebody would be like, "Hey, I've got a little extra money this year, and I'm thinking about having you build a guitar." Most people use it as an opportunity to get an instrument that complements their regular guitar. Salsburg, for example, is identified very much with Bourgeois guitars. He has the jumbo [JOM] and an OM and that's his sound.

He came to me, and his buddy Jim Elkington had gotten a Waterloo. "Jim's just loving this guitar—how about a 12-fret?" We said let's do X-braced, so it sounds a little warmer and fuller. I was in the process of building Salsburg's guitar,

'After I built four or five guitars on my own, I immediately had people wanting to buy them, which was weird'

when he sent me a text, "Steve Gunn is in Pittsburgh; he's playing at the Warhol with Lee Renaldo and Meg Baird. He's gonna stop by and ask you about a guitar." Steve came in—it was the first time I ever met him—and says, "So you're building a guitar for Nathan? Can you make me the same exact thing? Whatever Nathan is getting is good enough for me."

I noticed you don't play a Pleinview yourself. That's very telling, because you work in this store and speak with such reverence of all these other brands.

I'm playing a Kevin Kopp guitar, actually. I was getting ready to build myself a sloped D, a J-35 style, and then I just got really lucky. A good customer who actually now owns three Pleinviews sent this Kopp—essentially the guitar I was going to build—to the store for consignment from Chicago. So I traded him a build slot for the Kopp.

My Kopp guitar is a prototype—one of the first guitars Kevin made after he left Gibson [in the early 2000s]—and it doesn't have a name on the headstock. So everybody assumes that I built it. But I didn't, and I wish I had. **AC**



NICK MILLEVOI

Plastic Problems

All about celluloid rot—and what to do about it

BY MARTIN KEITH

Q: *I just inherited a beautiful vintage Gretsch acoustic from my uncle. It's in great shape and spent most of its life stored in the case, but some parts of the binding look awful. There are lots of tiny cracks, like it's crumbling to pieces. What is this, and can it be repaired?*

—Lev G., via email

A: Congratulations on the new (old) guitar! Your Gretsch is showing signs of what is commonly known in vintage guitar circles as celluloid rot. Essentially, this means that the plastic used for the binding is degrading. This is not due to any mistakes in handling, storing, or cleaning the guitar—the problem comes from the composition of the material itself. Let's take a quick look at its history and chemical properties, and why this deterioration seems to happen.

Celluloid is one of the earliest plastics. Chemically similar predecessors emerged in the late 1860s, and by 1870 the material was on the market as “Celluloid.” As the name suggests, the primary base material is cellulose, a plant compound that is also the basic building block of everything from paper to clothing. The addition of nitric acid creates a material we all know by name—nitrocellulose—which has become legendary as the lacquer of choice for nearly every beloved vintage guitar brand. Celluloid was also used to develop the substrates for camera film and served an important role as a substitute for elephant ivory in products ranging from billiard balls to hairbrush handles.

In order to make a workable and flexible material, manufacturers added plasticizers to

this formula, and the result was the very factory-friendly plastic binding that we know and love. It flexed and conformed easily to the curves on the guitar, glued quickly and easily with a range of adhesives, scraped and sanded well, looked beautiful, and bonded perfectly to lacquer. However, these plasticizers slowly migrate out of the plastic. To put it more simply, they vaporize and leave behind a shrunken and brittle result. This can happen relatively quickly in some cases—one of the worst I've ever witnessed was a guitar from the early 1980s.

Unfortunately, although the chemistry that causes celluloid rot is relatively well understood, the circumstantial factors that may affect it are still the subject of some speculation, even among repair and restoration professionals. Since the main culprit is the release of gases from the plastic, many believe that the rot can spread and contaminate other nearby guitars. Collectors of other

vintage celluloid products—particularly straight razors and fountain pens—seem to widely subscribe to this theory. Others insist that storing the guitar inside a case will accelerate the problem, as the gases are trapped inside the case and not allowed to dissipate into the surrounding air. There is anecdotal evidence on both sides, but not any really conclusive proof for either case.

Part of the reason for this speculation is that there seems to have been considerable inconsistency in celluloid manufacturing from batch to batch. East Coast guitar makers like Guild, Gretsch, and D'Angelico were likely purchasing from the same supplier, and thus those brands seem to represent a large percentage of cases of rot. (Gretsch is by far the most common that I've encountered.)

However, variables such as the type and quantity of adhesive used to glue the binding seem to be implicated, and these can vary from guitar to guitar, even within a particular brand.



MARTIN KEITH



Martin Keith

GOT A QUESTION?

Uncertain about guitar care and maintenance? The ins-and-outs of guitar building? Or another topic related to your gear? Ask *Acoustic Guitar's* repair expert Martin Keith by sending an email titled “Repair Expert” to Editors.AG@stringletter.com and we'll forward it to Keith.



If *AG* selects your question for publication, you'll receive a complimentary copy of *AG's Acoustic Guitar Owner's Manual*.

As a result, the problem is not always easy to predict by make or era.

One other potential culprit that has been identified is refinishing. Thanks to the chemical similarities between celluloid binding and nitrocellulose lacquer, some repair techs have suggested that refinishing a vintage guitar can potentially initiate binding rot, since the solvents in the lacquer will penetrate and soften the binding, making the molecular structure less stable.

Beyond the obvious cosmetic issues, celluloid rot can present other problems. The gases that escape from the plastic will attack the integrity of protein-based adhesives such as hide glue, which means that glue joints adjacent to the binding can open up or lose strength. Unfortunately, the longest glue joints on a guitar—those between the rim and the top or back—are directly in contact with the binding, so your luthier should always make sure to test or evaluate those joints prior to any repair. I've also seen cases where celluloid gases from fretboard binding will quite severely blacken nearby metals, such as the ends of frets.

Fortunately, for such a complicated problem, when it comes to repair, the course is clear: rotting binding needs to be removed and replaced. I have myself been tempted to try to fill and stabilize some lightly cracked celluloid in the past, but that is a short-term solution at best. And, as mentioned above, the solvents involved in doing touch-up work can make the situation worse.

Removal of rotted celluloid is fussy. Despite its chalky, powdery texture, it can take careful and precise work to cut it away without damaging the surrounding wood and finish. It has a potent odor and is highly flammable—I've even heard reports that it can self-ignite under certain conditions—so care is recommended at every level. Once degraded celluloid is removed, the guitar's binding ledges have to be cleaned, taking care not to leave behind any little seeds of old rotted plastic that could potentially contaminate the replacement binding. It's pretty common for people to save the little bits of binding or pickguard that fall off their guitars. If you do so, please handle and store them with caution. Or better yet, just dispose of these bits; there's really no use for them.

Matching the aged, amber-tinted lacquer on antique binding is a real art, and I've seen some unfortunate examples of nicely replaced binding that was poorly touched up and looked terribly out of place. I always recommend taking good photographs of the old binding prior to replacement to serve as a reference point for color during touchup. We are trying to

preserve these old instruments, and it is important to keep them looking correct.

The biggest question when restoring celluloid binding is whether to use celluloid for the replacement or substitute a different plastic that won't potentially suffer the same fate. Newer formulations of celluloid are most likely manufactured with much better consistency and control than was possible in the 1930s and '40s. However, if the choice is made to put new celluloid on an instrument, it's important to keep in mind that it is not guaranteed to be immune to rot in the future.

Given the cost and labor involved with replacing rotten binding, many players choose

to just live with it, or lightly tack-glue it in place to minimize losing the loose pieces. If you decide to leave it be, it's best to play it safe and not put it on the rack right next to your three D'Angelicos. When the time comes to finally replace the rotted binding, I'd recommend shopping around to find a luthier with some experience and understanding of the specifics of this problem—it could make a big difference in the quality of the result.

Martin Keith is a luthier, repair and restoration expert, and working musician based in Woodstock, New York. martinkeithguitars.com

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New World P640S FS

A beautifully made modern nylon-string with premium electronics

BY MARK GOLDENBERG

The renowned American luthier Kenny Hill has been making fine classical guitars for decades. His instruments feature premium tonewoods and hardware and often sport his take on the double top, a modern soundboard design that delivers enhanced volume and projection.

In the 1990s, Hill decided to offer a more budget-friendly line, initially producing instruments in Paracho, Mexico, a town legendary for its guitar-making tradition. Then, in the early 2000s, Hill moved production to East Asia, traveling frequently to China to set up shop and train luthiers for his New World line. Built from traditional tonewoods like spruce, cedar, and rosewood, New World guitars are inspected and set up at Hill's California shop before being offered for sale. New World's catalog includes the all-solid-wood Player series, the double-top Performance model, and the Estudio line, which features laminated Indian rosewood bodies as well as rosewood fretboards.

I recently auditioned a P640S FS—code for Player model; a shorter scale length of 640mm (compared to the traditional 650mm); spruce soundboard; and what Hill calls fingerstyle, a narrow nut of 48mm and radiused fretboard, specs designed to appeal to the steel-string guitarist looking to also play nylon-string.

The review model features a Canadian spruce top, Indian rosewood back and sides, a Spanish cedar neck, and an ebony fingerboard. Other appointments include a relatively narrow nut, a Venetian cutaway for higher fret access, and a Barbera Soloist pickup. The fingerboard sports 18 frets, with an additional mini fret at the end of the neck, around the soundhole. There's also an adjustable truss rod—a feature not traditionally seen on classical guitars—which can be accessed at the end of the neck, underneath the top.

STYLISH AND WELL BUILT

The fit and finish on the P640S FS is very good. The gloss polyurethane finish is very neatly applied—thin, with no buildups at





angles and corners—and it feels smooth and even to the touch. Upon close inspection, I couldn't find any buffing marks. The two-piece spruce top is expertly matched and exhibits faint bearclaw figuring and mineral striping. It's very attractive and subtle, leaning to the whiter side of the spectrum in terms of coloration. The rosette, with touches of dark green and two parallel bands of reddish-brown, is stylish and understated; black-and-white purfling adds a refined touch at the soundboard's edges.

A thin band of light-colored wood decorates the bridge's string block, and the Barbera pickup—which is both a transducer and the saddle itself—blends in well, although it is different than the bone saddles most players are accustomed to seeing. (The guitar is also available with a traditional bone saddle and no pickup.)

The P6405 FS's back and sides look lovely, well-matched with a dark-chocolate hue and an attractive grain pattern. The soundboard's purfling theme is carried over to the back and sides, tying together the cleanly executed look of the guitar. And inside the box, the workmanship is unsurprisingly precise—I saw no glue drips, tool marks, or other signs of sloppiness.

The neck and heel are assembled together smoothly, although they are quite different in hue. I felt the contrast looked a little odd, but I'm admittedly picky about these things. The ebony fingerboard is evenly dark in coloration and the fretwork is super clean, without any jaggedness at the edges. There's a single side dot at the seventh fret, traditional for classical guitarists but perhaps a bit too minimal for steel-string players. More dots, please—they're cheap.

With a nut width of 1-7/8 inches and saddle spacing of 2.25 inches, the P6405 FS will feel familiar to guitarists accustomed to steel-string instruments. The neck has a very comfortable D shape, with a gradual thickening towards the body of the guitar, which feels even and natural. I should add that while the Der Jung tuners help the guitar hold its intonation reasonably well, they don't feel as rock-solid as ones you might find on a more expensive guitar.

AN INVITING VOICE

Our review model's setup was good, with the strings set slightly higher than you would find on a steel-string. I played up and down the neck on all six strings and every note rang true and clear, without any buzzy frets or dead spots. Working through some original tunes as well as jazz standards like "Nardis" and "Autumn Leaves," I found the narrow nut and shorter scale length really advantageous for chord voicings that involved big stretches—the ones I love but usually shy away from when I'm on a nylon-string.

Played unamplified, the P6405 FS really satisfies with its inviting voice. The treble strings have clarity but retain a nice roundness as one ventures higher up the neck; the basses are deep and clear, although at first I found the low E string ever so slightly more resonant than the others. Overall, the guitar sounds solid, round, and clear, with an authoritative presence. The instrument's volume and projection seem similar to that of my own classical guitars—not quite as loud as my Kenny Hill double-top, but on par with a traditional nylon-string made by the luthier Julia Wenzel.

RESPONSIVE AND NATURAL-SOUNDING ELECTRONICS

The Barbera pickup is a passive unit—no preamp or battery required. I plugged the P6405 FS directly into my DAW with a UAD Apollo interface and also played it on a gig at the Ojai Underground Exchange, in Ojai, California, using Henriksen's The Blu amplifier. (The accompanying video was recorded by the musician and producer Bernie Larsen at the Ojai gig using a microphone and a DI.)

The amplified sound is open, full range to the point of being bright and loud. It feels uncompressed, with none of the quack that undersaddle pickups often exhibit, and extremely responsive to dynamics. To my ears the pickup was a bit biting, however, and I had to use the amp's tone controls to soften the effect a bit. Since the guitar itself has no onboard volume or tone controls, an external preamp and a volume pedal would be great complements to this system. And speaking of volume, I tested the guitar at higher levels than normal and found it to be fairly feedback resistant. In other words, it's a very gig-worthy instrument.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The New World P6405 FS is an extremely well-made guitar that is a joy to play. With its narrow nut, smooth cutaway, and natural-sounding pickup system, it's a great choice for the steel-string fingerstylist or jazz guitarist who is looking to expand their sonic palette into the world of the nylon-string guitar. **AG**

SPECS

BODY Canadian spruce top; Indian rosewood back and sides; rosewood bridge with 57.5mm (2.25") string spacing; polyurethane finish

NECK 640mm (about 25.2") scale Spanish cedar neck with ebony fretboard (16" radius); 48mm (1-7/8") nut width; Der Jung tuners; polyurethane finish

OTHER Bone nut; D'Addario J46 hard tension strings; Barbera Soloist pickup; hardshell case

MADE IN China (set up in U.S.)

PRICE \$1,900 street (as reviewed); \$1,600 street (without electronics)

newworldguitar.com



Gibson G-45 Studio

**An affordable, warm,
and addictively playable
acoustic-electric**

BY JAMES ROTONDI

Of all the metrics by which we judge an acoustic guitar, perhaps the best measure of how it fits us—our playing styles, our personalities—is the degree to which it inspires new song ideas the moment we pick it up. With Gibson's pocketbook-friendly and finely crafted new G-45 Studio, you can be fairly confident in enjoying that kind of fluent partnership with your instrument. Immensely comfortable to hold with its smooth, rounded edges, the G-45 sports the same classic slope-shouldered dreadnought shape as its prized namesake—the J-45—and a sweet, warm dash of responsive and wide dynamics almost anywhere you pick around the soundhole.

If Gibson were looking to make a peace offering to those put off by the cost of its premium acoustics, the company has come up with not one but two fine candidates for that role with the G-45 Studio and the slightly pricier, gloss-top-finished G-45 Standard, both produced in their Bozeman, Montana, workshop. Right out of the box, the G-45 Studio feels like a well-worn pair of jeans or a favorite coffee mug—which is to say, there's very little between you and your next song, riff, or single-note line. Indeed, even with its substantial Advance Response neck profile, the G-45 Studio is a breeze to play: The light strings (.012–.053) are easily bent, full barre chords provide no great challenge, and you're unlikely to encounter fatigue after hours of playing.



G-45 Studio



BACK TO THE WOOD

Often compared to koa in terms of tonal properties, walnut is a sustainable alternative to tropical tonewoods that grows abundantly in North America. It's used liberally on the G-45 Studio—the fretboard, belly-up bridge (with compensated Tusq saddle and Tusq bridge pins), headstock overlay, and truss-rod cover are all fashioned from walnut, contributing to the guitar's lovely aesthetic unity and its noticeably woody character.

Walnut is known for bell-like highs and a tight, focused midrange, as well as a dark bass undertone that can take some playing time to really emerge. The G-45 validates that recipe, often admired by fingerstyle players who want rounded, focused tones. Still, pairing walnut back and sides with a Sitka spruce top—along with proper domed top braces and scalloped X-bracing—edges

neck joint, in the zingy highs so coveted on full-bore strumming, and the G-45 is a serious performer in those tonal areas.

Nevertheless, the guitar doesn't lack for lows either, and it's especially cool that it loses relatively little of its bass response and resonance as you capo up the neck. Even with a Kyser clamped on at the fifth fret, you can still hear a rich, dark, and very pleasing low-midrange quality, particularly when fingerpicking or using your thumbnail. I imagine that the neck—made of utile, a tropical African wood resembling mahogany in both tone and appearance—contributes to that overall low-mid resonance. (It's also worth noting the G-45's hide-glued dovetail neck joint—a premium feature on a cost-effective guitar.) Again, try experimenting with your picking hand across the entire soundhole area, from neck to bridge, and you'll discover a potent EQ tool just by virtue of the G-45 Studio's many sweet spots.

Right out of the box, the G-45 Studio feels like a well-worn pair of jeans or a favorite coffee mug—which is to say, there's very little between you and your next song, riff, or single-note line.

the G-45 Studio toward big-strummer territory as well. The guitar has no lack of harmonic richness and overtones in the top end, and plenty of midrange projection, making it a solid choice as an all-purpose acoustic.

That said, with a slimmer body depth than, for instance, a Martin D-18, the G-45 Studio is not a big boomer in quite the fashion one might expect from a full-sized dreadnought—at least not fresh from the factory. You'll want to direct your picking hand directly over the soundhole to elicit the kind of low-end *oomph* that's easily culled from a classic dread. This is hardly a surprise—like the iconic J-45, the G-45 has a relatively short scale length of 24-3/4 inches, so what you may lose in volume and projection, you handily make up for in playability and midrange focus.

Still, that may well be a blessing in disguise for a brilliantly balanced guitar that's so well suited to studio work, where the bassy bigness of a typical dreadnought is often lost or surgically EQ'd out of the mix. A studio acoustic typically finds its sweet spot in the midrange, or, with a C-style microphone pointed off the

SOUNDING BOARD

While the basic tone and playability—indeed the whole personality—of the G-45 Studio is immediately likeable right out of the box, the same cannot exactly be said for its tonal partnership with the Fishman Sonitone package, an undersaddle piezo and preamp system, with tone and volume controls conveniently tucked just inside the soundhole's edge. The Sonitone electronics do a decent job of representing the basic balance between the strings and preserving the G-45's bottom-end focus, but they don't really bring out the warmth, character, or coppery nuances of the G-45's upper mids and highs, perhaps due to a lack of EQ functionality.

The result is a whiff of that all-too-familiar piezo quack, a bit lacking in warmth and brilliance. Played through a Fender Acoustasonic Junior amp, it was difficult to remove the hard poke of the midrange without compromising the character of the mids entirely; the tone control on the Sonitone was only mildly helpful. A Fishman Aura 16 imaging pedal did, however, prove helpful in restoring some of the G-45's sheen and richness.

Better results were achieved in the studio running the guitar through a Universal Audio Apollo Twin interface and adding a couple of key plug-ins: a UA 610-B preamp (with some bass cut and treble boost); some light Fairchild compression; and a UAD EMT-140 Classic Plate Reverberator, which helped open up the G-45's higher frequencies in a way more suited to the guitar's naturally bronzy upper register and organically open sound. That said, eschewing the pickup altogether, almost any mic sounded good on the G-45

with very little on the back end, including very inexpensive ones like an MXL 993 Condenser mic and a Rode NT5, all with a minimum of fuss. Look, this is a really good-sounding guitar, period, regardless of cost. It could use an internal pickup system that is more tonally compatible—and which keeps it at around the same attractive price point.

THE WRAP

When it comes to shopping for acoustic guitars, pricier may be better on paper and in terms of display appeal, and one is likely to get more premium woods, with fewer compromises in terms of materials. But a sensibly priced acoustic may well speak to your personality and playing style better than one costing thousands more.

At \$999 street, including hardshell case, Gibson's G-45 Studio (and likewise, the \$1,299 G-45 Standard) represents a very good-faith effort to bring a handcrafted, solid-wood, U.S.-made acoustic guitar to the market that sounds great, looks lovely, feels good and inspiring to play, and records beautifully. Gibson has succeeded mightily. The G-45 Studio may well be exactly the kind of acoustic guitar you want to have within reach at all times. **AG**

SPECS

BODY Slope-shouldered dreadnought; solid Sitka spruce top with scalloped X-bracing; solid walnut back and sides; walnut bridge with 2.165" string spacing; satin finish

NECK 24-3/4"-scale utile neck with Advanced Response profile; 1.725" nut width; walnut fingerboard with 16" radius; Grover mini Rotomatic tuners; satin finish

OTHER Tusq nut and saddle; coated phosphor bronze strings (.012–.053); G-Series hardshell case; Gibson accessory kit

PRICE \$999 street

MADE IN United States

gibson.com

Beard A-Model Odyssey

A modern resonator with an appealingly unique voice

BY PETE MADSEN

In the mid-1980s, a young Paul Beard—having degrees in aviation mechanics and mechanical engineering under his belt but unable to find work in those fields—turned to his other love: music. As a performer, teacher, and stringed-instrument repairman, he became disenchanted with the quality of many resonator guitars on the market and set out to use new technologies to create a better instrument.

This would be no mean feat, as it required looking forward while also honoring the tradition of resonator guitars established in the 1920s and '30s by the Dopyera brothers, makers of the first National and Dobro resonators. But Beard succeeded, to say the least. He finished his first instrument in 1985 and now makes his namesake Beard Guitars for a stable of players including Vince Gill, Jerry Douglas, Cindy Cashdollar, and Keb' Mo', among many other phenomenal musicians.

I recently got to spend some time with the A-Model Odyssey, an instrument fitted with Beard's triple-spun Legend cone, coupled with a tuned spider-bridge system. If the review model is any indication, that hardware—and the beautifully crafted, all-solid-wood guitar on which it's mounted—makes for a brilliantly voiced resonator.

AT ONCE RETRO AND MODERN

With its mixture of vintage and modern appointments, the Odyssey has a stunning look that is certain to captivate the audience at any gig. From its Maccaferri-style oval soundhole to its distinctive resonator cover to its curly maple binding, the Odyssey stands apart from the typical resonator guitar. A sloped headstock also gives it a whimsical flare.

Every detail, from the fret dressing to the wood choice, shines through on this extremely well-made guitar. The instrument is available in a variety of tonewood combos; the test model's solid mahogany back and sides have a light, almost greenish hue that is



A-Model Odyssey



reminiscent of koa, and the contrast between the tannish maple binding on the neck and body and the brownish-orange coloring of the back and sides is particularly elegant.

In addition to those cosmetic details, the Odyssey has a couple of interesting structural features that make it stand out from the crowd. Beard looked to loudspeaker design in making a resonator guitar with increased projection and bass response. The luthier refers to the Odyssey's oval soundhole as a bass port, with the internal architecture designed to focus the low-end frequencies towards it. The port is divided internally from the resonator by a reflex baffle, which leads to increased bass focus and separates it from the treble springing from the cover plate. Also, the Odyssey is missing the sound ring found in many other resonators; in its place there are two sound posts, resulting in a more open-sounding instrument.

BASS FOR DAYS

There are, of course, distinct design-quality and tonal differences between spider-cone resonators and biscuit-bridge and tricone versions. Relative to its counterparts, the spider-cone produces a honky, nasal quality, at least to my ears. This resonator type is favored by bluegrass players, who tend to play square-neck dobros. Blues guitarists also use spider-

cone instruments, but it's the biscuit-bridge type that is more associated with players like Booker "Bukka" White and Son House.

In any case, I was expecting the spider-cone-equipped Odyssey, with its relatively wide 15-inch lower bout and four-inch body depth, to have a powerful bass, and I wasn't disappointed. A rich, deep low end emanated from the oval soundhole and resonator as I played some Delta-style blues in dropped-D tuning. It was tempting to keep a steady drone, with the sixth string sustaining, and soak up all the creamy bass goodness in the open position, but I ascended through the middle strings and on up the neck, which were equally inviting.

In all registers, the Odyssey has a decidedly dark timbre that invites you to dig in without experiencing the bright, high-end shrieks that are common on resonators. Whether I played with or without a bottleneck slide, a rich, deep tone permeated throughout the guitar's playing range, from low sixth-string notes through the highest register on the first string. But the sound was never muddy or undefined; it's just an appealingly unique tonal character.

The Odyssey is equipped with a Fishman Nashville Series Spider-Style Resophonic pickup. I plugged into an AER MM200 amplifier (reviewed in the January/February 2020 issue) and, with the EQ controls on the amplifier set

flat, I found the high end a little lacking. The Odyssey doesn't have onboard controls, so all volume and EQ adjustments must be made on an amplifier or outboard preamp. When I notched the treble up slightly on the AER, the Odyssey sounded in accord with its acoustic self: warm and full.

The Odyssey feels as good as it sounds. With its factory-set low action, it's a breeze to play, whether flatpicking or fingerpicking up and down the neck. I particularly enjoyed using a pick on this instrument, which played like an electric guitar, but with a slightly stiffer feel. Fingerpicking also felt great and not too cramped, thanks to the 1.75-inch nut. As a blues fingerpicker first and foremost, I gravitate toward guitars with wider fretboards and V-shaped necks. The Odyssey's C-shaped neck definitely has a more modern feel, but it's not so narrow that bigger hands would feel uncomfortable.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Beard's A-Model Odyssey is a beautifully designed and built guitar that looks, feels, and sounds every bit like the boutique instrument it is. A modern vibe, combined with some traditional appointments, gives this resonator a distinct sound and feel. Those who favor the sound of spider-cone instruments should definitely check out the Odyssey. **AG**

SPECS

BODY 15" lower bout; solid spruce top; solid mahogany back and sides; curly maple binding; tuned oval soundhole; custom Beard bass reflex baffle; triple-spun Legend cone; solar cover plate; adjustable 14" spider bridge

NECK Mahogany neck; 25" scale length; ebony fretboard; Waverly open-gear tuners, 1-3/4" bone nut

OTHER Fishman Nashville Series Spider-Style Resophonic pickup; Schaller S-Locks; D'Addario EJ17 strings (.013-.056); TKL hardshell case

MADE IN United States

PRICE \$3,900 street

beardguitars.com





DPA 4099 CORE

A microphone designed to bring studio smoothness to the stage

BY EMILE MENASCHÉ

DPA's series of 4099 CORE microphones includes models designed to cover a wide range of instruments, depending on their sound-pressure levels. Each mic features some important qualities—a small footprint, a pre-polarized supercardioid condenser capsule, and mounting hardware optimized for the instrument in question.

I tested a version designed to work best with acoustic guitar, mandolin, dobro, and ukulele. According to DPA, the new mic was designed to improve clarity, openness, and consistency over its predecessor (reviewed in the August 2009 issue of *AG*). With already high gain before feedback, the goal was to offer a more natural-sounding alternative to onboard pickups—or a complement to a guitar's electronics system. Of course, the mic can also be used for recording. And because it clamps onto the guitar, you could use it in addition to stand-mounted mics without getting in the way of them.

OUT OF THE BOX

As you might expect from a mic with a street price topping \$600, the 4099 comes in a sturdy case. In it, I found the mic mounted to a lightweight five-inch gooseneck, a mounting bracket for the guitar, a six-foot cable, an adapter that converts the cable's MicroDot connector to XLR, and a soft padded bag. The mic itself is tiny—under a quarter inch in diameter and less than two inches long, though it looks larger inside its foam windscreen.

I'm not sure if it was just missing from my package, but I didn't find mounting instructions in the case. Fortunately, DPA has an online video that shows how it's done in under 30 seconds (although it took me a full minute the first time). It's actually really brilliant. The gooseneck snaps to a little clip on one end of the lightweight mounting bracket. It's held in place with a collar

that snaps over the clip. You can choose where along the length of the gooseneck to clip the mic, and the gooseneck is long enough to allow plenty of adjustment without moving the bracket.

The bracket is held in place by clamps running from the guitar's top to its back and can be adjusted to fit a range of body depths. I had no trouble mounting it to a small-bodied Martin 00-18, a much larger Taylor 814CE, and a mid-depth Epiphone archtop. The span of the clamp is set by sliding one of its jaws along a track. The jaws have a smooth but rubberized finish to prevent marring the finish. A quick release lever lets you slide the jaws open to remove or reposition the mic.

You don't need any tools to mount or move the mic—a major plus in live situations. I tried three or four different spots on both the bass and treble sides of the guitar and was sure I'd bump the mic while I was playing. But I never touched it—not even when strumming vigorously.

PLUGGING IN

The 4099's lightweight and flexible cable screws in at the butt of the gooseneck, which keeps it well out of the way. The other end connects to an XLR adapter that has a clip on its barrel. The clip prevented me from plugging the adapter directly into an amp or preamp; I had to put a short XLR cable in between. However, there's an upside: the clip can also take the gooseneck directly, and thanks to the clip, you can mount the mic on something other than the guitar—like, say, a music stand. [Note: DPA reports that the clip in fact includes a replacement ring for plugging the XLR adapter directly into an amp, preamp, or interface.]

The need for phantom power meant that I needed to grab a mic preamp when testing with

my Crate Acoustic CA125D, but if you're going direct to a mixing board or recording interface, it won't be an issue. The mic can handle peak sound pressure levels up to 142dB, and the overall dynamic range is 100dB. DPA reports frequency response to be 20Hz–20kHz and a frequency range at 20 cm (about eight inches) of 80Hz–15kHz with 2dB soft boost at 10–12 kHz—all well within a guitar's range.

Tested with the 00-18, I was surprised by how much low end the mic produced. The guitar sounded more like its unplugged self when I rolled back some bass or moved the mic to focus on the treble side, but I also liked the way I could position the DPA to give the little Martin more heft and authority on fingerpicked lines. The mic was well suited to the bigger sound of the Taylor. It was a bit harder to find the sweet spot on the archtop, but once I did it brought out the instrument's acoustic qualities well.

Although the 4099 is designed for high output before feedback, it's not like you can just slap it on the guitar, turn up the amp, and have worry-free sound. The laws of physics apply, even with smartly designed equipment. When I played too close to the speakers, I was treated to rings and howls. More than once, I wished there was a kill switch on the mic or gooseneck; it could be a lifesaver if you're doing your own sound at a gig.

The DPA 4099 CORE instrument microphone is player-friendly, sonically flexible, and way less of a hassle to use than you might expect from an instrument-mounted mic. It's not exactly instant gratification, but once you've found the sweet spots for your instruments, the DPA 4099 offers an elegant, high-fidelity alternative to pickups and stage mics. **AC**

SPECS

Microphone type: Pre-polarized condenser with supercardioid polar pattern and small diaphragm

Frequency range: 20Hz–20kHz

Maximum SPL: 142dB

Signal-to-noise ratio: 71dB (A weighted)

Self-noise: 23dB (A weighted)

Output impedance: 30–40Ω

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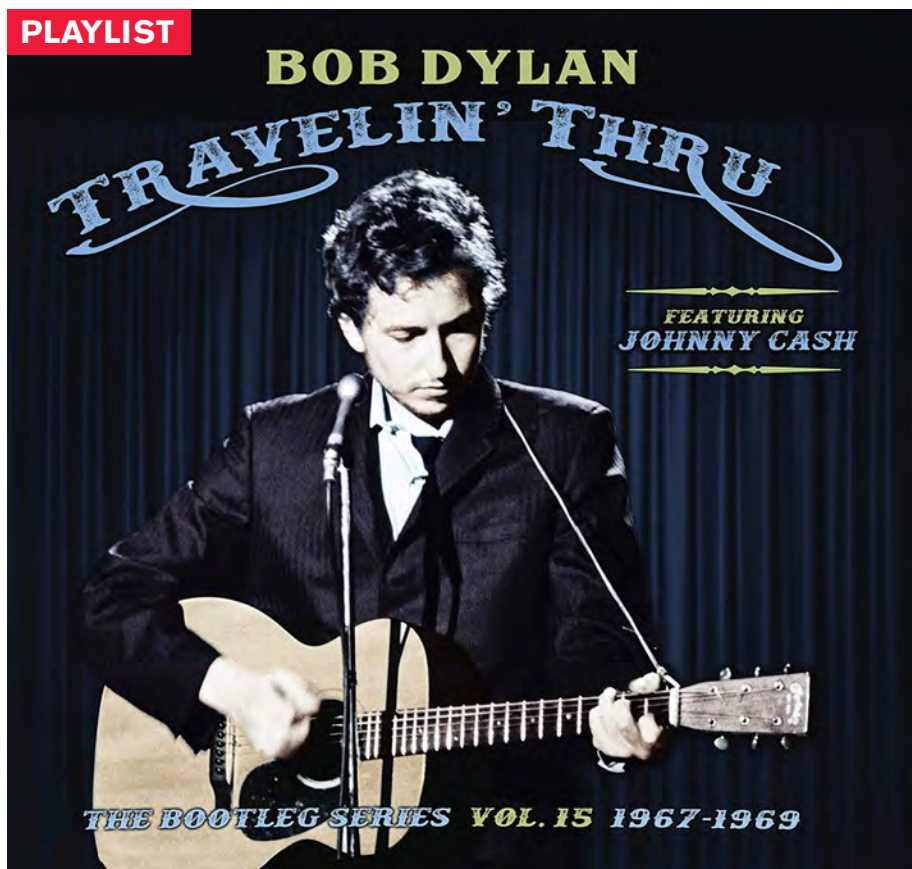


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PLAYLIST



Bob Dylan, *The Bootleg Series, Vol. 15: Travelin' Thru, 1967-1969* (Sony/Legacy)

It's a Bob-a-Palooza!

Fans of Dylan's mid-career acoustic shift get another gem

BY GREG CAHILL

Bob Dylan's never-ending tour has veered through challenging territory over the past ten years, including a collection of traditional Christmas songs and three albums of Frank Sinatra saloon tunes and other standards. Fortunately, Sony/Legacy continues to crank out a steady stream of rare and unreleased Dylan material, including 2018's *Live 1962-1966: Rare Performances from the Copyright Collections*; *The Bootleg Series, Vol. 14: More Blood, More Tracks*; last year's *Bob Dylan: The Rolling Thunder Revue: The 1975 Live Recordings*; and now *The Bootleg Series, Vol. 15: Travelin' Thru, 1967-1969*.

Travelin' Thru captures Dylan at the outset of his return to acoustic-based music, after the electrified 1966 album *Blonde on Blonde*, his subsequent motorcycle accident, and the recording of *The Basement Tapes* with The Band. That period saw Dylan record five consecutive acoustic guitar-based albums, beginning with 1967's *John Wesley Harding* and ending with

the 1973 soundtrack *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid*.

Travelin' Thru offers alternate versions, outtakes, and TV performances, including a disc featuring country legend Johnny Cash and another with bluegrass great Earl Scruggs. Country pickers on those sessions included Norman Blake, Fred Carter Jr., Pete Drake, Bob Wooten, and Randy Scruggs. It was a fertile creative period that also spawned *The Basement Tapes*, though those songs—a collaboration with the Band—remained unreleased until 1975. *Travelin' Thru* chronicles a pivotal time: Gone is the electric Dylan, the hipster, who has abandoned the obtuse pop poetry of *Blonde on Blonde* in favor of folksy ballads, like “I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine,” Dylan's Biblical parable inspired by the union song “I Dreamed I Saw Joe Hill Last Night.”

A few versions of this set are available, both physical and digital—the CD edition offers 50 tracks on three CDs, plus a booklet (vinyl is six discs and large-format booklet). CD Disc 1

features Dylan's tenure at Columbia's Studio A in Nashville. In addition to alternate versions of compositions written for *John Wesley Harding* and *Nashville Skyline*, the set includes the previously unreleased outtake “Western Road,” as well as alternate versions of “Lay Lady Lay,” “I Threw It All Away,” “I Pity the Poor Immigrant,” “I Am a Lonesome Hobo,” and “All Along the Watchtower.” Most are faster and jauntier than the final takes—

***Travelin' Thru* captures Dylan at a specific time and place, when at the height of his pop stardom, he threw it all away to reclaim his folk roots and his mortal soul through an exploration of American music.**

as on a few other Bootleg Series releases, it's intriguing to hear Dylan work out these arrangements. For example, “As I Went Out This Morning” finds him pleading over a shuffle-beat on a song that ultimately arrived much more subdued.

His 1969 sessions with Cash dominate the second disc. You hear the duo in the studio and on-stage at the Ryman Auditorium while recording the premiere episode of *The Johnny Cash Show*, broadcast on ABC-TV. There is a striking version of “I Threw It All Away,” a rehearsal take of the country hit “I Guess Things Happen That Way,” an alternate version of “I Walk the Line,” and a “Ring of Fire” outtake. Other highlights include the blues standard “Careless Love” and an intimate rehearsal of “Girl from the North Country,” on which Cash reminds the composer about the lyrics.

Disc 3 finds Dylan and Earl Scruggs spinning their way through a Jimmie Rodgers medley, with Cash and rockabilly legend Carl Perkins. The real treat is hearing Dylan team up with Earl, Randy, and Gary Scruggs on what can best be called the lost Dylan bluegrass album—actually three Dylan originals, including “The Nashville Skyline Rag,” and a spirited rendition of A.P. Carter's “East Virginia Blues,” which aired in the 1970 PBS television special *Earl Scruggs: His Family and Friends*.

Dylan would soon release the poorly received *Self-Portrait*, an underrated collection of covers. Eventually, he shifted to religious material and returned to rock and blues. But *Travelin' Thru* captures Dylan at a specific time and place, when at the height of his pop stardom, he threw it all away to reclaim his folk roots and his mortal soul through an exploration of American music.

Woody Guthrie would have been proud. **AC**

See page 102 for a transcription of the Dylan/Cash version of “Just a Closer Walk with Thee.”



Ondra Kozák

Overtones

(OndraKozák.com/en)

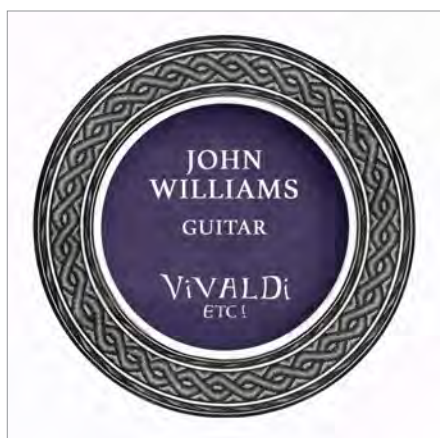
A virtuosic showcase and tribute to vintage guitars

For his solo guitar showcase *Overtones*, Czech bluegrass player Ondra Kozák follows a simple concept: 12 songs played on 12 vintage guitars. The instruments span 80 years, ranging from an 1889 Martin 2-21 to a 1969 Martin D-12-35. The primarily flatpicked songs include traditional tunes, originals, a classical piece, a pop hit, and a Bill Monroe chestnut.

Playing a 1944 Martin D-28, Kozák invigorates Monroe's "Wheel Hoss" with rattling strums and galloping G runs that threaten to smash through the guard rail at any moment. On the old-time "Grandfather's Clock," Kozák mimics the rhythms of the titular timepiece, entwining Travis picking, crosspicking, left-hand tapping, and ghostly harmonics on a 1926 Gibson Nick Lucas Special. "Killing Me Softly with His Song," a number-one hit for Roberta Flack in 1973, gets an ethereal make-over, as Kozák's arpeggiated picking on a 1930 Martin OM-18 threads through Baroque-inspired rhythms. On Debussy's "La fille aux cheveux de lin," he plucks delicate harmonics high on the neck of a raw-toned 1942 Gibson L-O.

This infectious set also includes a pair of medleys paying tribute to two of Kozák's inspirations, guitarists David Grier and Michal Vavro, which are by turns elegant and dynamic, insouciant and propulsive. Despite the variety of vintage instruments and flatpicking techniques on display, *Overtones* is more than just a virtuosic showcase or fond tribute to classic guitars. Kozák's modest 12-tunes-on-12-guitars experiment is a celebration of the impromptu joy of picking up an old guitar and playing it.

—Pat Moran



John Williams

Vivaldi, Etc.

(JCW Recordings)

Classical guitar master is still in top form on Baroque-era set

One of the preeminent classical guitarists of his generation—and really, of all time—John Williams is 78 now, has stopped touring, and records less frequently these days. But, as this exquisite album of Baroque-era compositions by Bach, Vivaldi, Silvius Leopold Weiss, and Irish composer and harpist Turlough O'Carolan shows, Williams is still at the peak of his interpretive powers, playing his own marvelous transcriptions of pieces originally written for other instruments. In the case of Bach's "Prelude, Fugue & Allegro" (BWV 998), he first recorded it when he was just 22 years old, but now finds that version "boring and so staid," so he revisited it here.

I find that I am often most drawn to the slower, highly lyrical movements of Baroque works—in this case the "Larghetto" in the Vivaldi *Concerto* (Op. 3, No. 9), and the free-standing "Sarabandes" by Weiss (from a suite Williams used to play) and Bach (from "Violin Partita No. 1" BWV 1002); all are sensitively and passionately delivered. But the more spry movements are as full of life as one could hope for, too, and the recording by engineer Mike Horner captures every nuance of Williams' sparkling and powerful Greg Smallman & Sons instrument.

And if you are unfamiliar with O'Carolan, this is a good place to start. Classical guitarists have increasingly been drawn to his works, which show both the influence of contemporaries like Vivaldi and folk music of the era in Ireland. Everything Williams touches shows his incomparable mastery and self-assurance. Don't miss this album!

—Blair Jackson



Bill Scorzari

Now I'm Free

(BillScorzari.com)

Ruminative originals in uncluttered arrangements

With his third album, *Now I'm Free*, Bill Scorzari transcends titles like songwriter or poet. He catapults past categories into a dark, ruminative, and ultimately life-affirming realm where family folklore, memories, pain, prayer, and incantation meet.

Throughout 15 originals, recorded live in the studio, Scorzari's uncluttered arrangements leave space for Will Kimbrough's and Juan Solorzano's radiating electric, slide and lap steel guitars, Scorzari's cycling acoustics, and producer Neilson Hubbard's scampering drums. Threading through it all are Scorzari's gentle, gravelly vocals, which dovetail from rhythmic couplets to the rambling idioms of conversation.

Scorzari's cantering acoustic and Solorzano's sighing pedal steel entwine in "Over Again," which documents the exhausting effort it takes to process pain. Similarly, "New Mexico" presents a stream-of-consciousness travelogue through barren lands that serves as a metaphor for acceptance and understanding. Erin Rae's vocal harmonies flutter in free-fall on "One More Time," a doppelganger to Scorzari's soulful sandpaper croon in a paean to the power of self-healing.

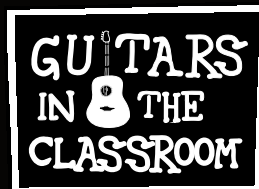
Recorded in an unrehearsed first take, the 11-minute "Yes I Am" is a poetic, conversational, and soul-wrenching quest. Riding atop his whirlpooling cross-picking, Scorzari sets images of nature—like the touch of an ancient tree's rough bark and dragonflies darting in the wind—next to the self-deprecating humor of casting himself as a punch-drunk superman, in a rumination about finding meaning in the enigma of existence. By journey's end, it is clear that you can't appreciate the moonlight without accepting the darkness that surrounds it.

—PM

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PLAYLIST



Tony Skinner

The Acoustic Composer

(Highpoint Records)

Accessible originals boosted by choice of guitars

On his solo guitar showcase *The Acoustic Composer*, songwriter, player, author, and educator Tony Skinner never allows his virtuosity to overshadow the accessibility of his 12 compositions on this disc. Drawing on a complement of seven vintage Martin guitars dating back to 1927, as well as a 2003 Avalon A200, Skinner imbues these recordings with warmth and a sense of familiarity.

As with most memorable instrumentals, each of these adroitly turned tunes tells a tale. On "The Pioneers Trail," Skinner's 1941 Martin 000-18 suggests a cinematic westward quest, with an exploratory melody bolstered with ringing harmonics that mimic the rustic tones of a hammered dulcimer.

Resonant picking on his 1961 Martin D-21 pirouettes and whirls like falling leaves on "I Hope You'll Be Strong (When I'm Gone)," conveying the ephemeral warmth of Indian summer. "The Sun Won't Always Shine" conjures mixed emotions. Skinner's woody-toned 1947 Martin 00-18 ripples like the current in a mountain stream, but the plaintive melody hints that shadows are lengthening.

On "Fiesta," the Avalon's picking seems flamenco-influenced as it rings with a metallic tang before dovetailing into a *rasgueado*-style flourish. And Skinner slips descending spirals from his 1936 Martin 00-17 into the chiming "View from a Hill," adding a touch of bluegrass barn-burning to the Spanish-flavored composition.

But it is "Escape of the Falcon" that paints the most vivid picture. Here, helter-skelter cross-picking on Skinner's 1997 Martin 000-28EC tumbles out as percussive switchbacks depicting the abrupt twists and turns of airborne pursuit. —PM



The Milk Carton Kids

The Only Ones

(Milk Carton/Thirty Tigers)

Duo returns to spare acoustic guitar arrangements

The Milk Carton Kids' 2018 *All The Things That I Did And All The Things That I Didn't Do* had a whole world of sound, with acoustic guitarists Kenneth Pattengale and Joey Ryan making room for cello, clarinet, double bass, drums, electric guitar, mandolin, mellotron, organ, pedal steel, piano, tenor sax, and violin. It was a sharp-minded, careful combination that balanced intimacy and gravity, and it makes their 2019 follow-up an especially powerful statement.

By contrast, the Milk Carton Kids are the only ones on *The Only Ones*, with Ryan playing straight man on a 1951 Gibson J-45 and Pattengale weaving in, out, up, down, and around on an all-mahogany 1954 Martin 0-15 that's never sounded better. The album is so quiet you can hear beauty in the smallest movements, like the way the vocals lag behind the rhythm in "About the Size of a Pixel," and how the harmonies intertwine on the breakup tune "I Meant Every Word I Said."

The quietness of the production makes these songs feel especially brittle and heart-worn, as if there's nothing left for Pattengale and Ryan to hide. On "The Only Ones," they're singing to a lover who's too "tired, tired, so tired" to even think about leaving, and in "My Name is Ana," they sing about a little girl living in an attic, kept awake by a vision of the men who are going to come and take her away. It's the kind of loneliness that can only come from two voices and two guitars, twinned but solitary, singing and writing with a haunting beauty. —KB



Billy Strings

Home
(Rounder)

Trad bluegrass infused with psychedelia and more

Home begins with 30 seconds of down-tempo guitar arpeggio and fiddle birdsong. It ends with the full quartet—Billy Strings (guitar), Billy Failing (banjo), Royal Massat (upright bass), and Jarrod Walker (mandolin)—crashing through a cover of Bill Monroe's "Big Sandy River." In between, there's an hour of bluegrass played with a 26-year-old's intensity, a hearty dose of psychedelia, and undeniable star appeal. Born William Apostol, Strings has it all: incomparable chops, powerful vocals, and songwriting smarts.

Songs like the opening "Taking Water" can pass for classic bluegrass, with three-finger banjo, boom-chuck guitar, crying fiddle, four-part harmonies, and clear echoes of Jimmy Martin and Flatt & Scruggs. But elsewhere, you can hear everything else Apostol listened to growing up, especially Pearl Jam, Jimi Hendrix, and Slayer. Trad bluegrass lyrics about "cold, cold ashes" and "that mournful sound" quickly give way to lines about dying friends, decaying cities, memories too painful to recall, and "the empty spot in me/where my hometown used to be."

Songs like "Away from the Mire" and "Home" start as singer-songwriter folk before transforming into seven-minute bluegrass epics, complete with psychedelic electric guitar, sitar, keyboard effects, string sections, and fiddle reverb that ultimately resolve themselves into the sound of one flatpicked acoustic guitar. That's what he does on "Guitar Peace" too, a four-minute instrumental, and it's the most startling thing about the album: the way Strings can channel the Grand Ole Opry one minute, fly his freak flag the next, and be perfectly at home in both. —KB

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Magnificent Obsession

Beautiful, collectible volume traces the acoustic guitar's evolution and more

BY DICK BOAK

Clearly, John Stubbings is afflicted with the same malady that affects most of us—an obsessive fascination with and magnetic pull toward the acoustic guitar. For the better part of six years, the author set out on a personal pilgrimage to search out the origins of the acoustic guitar and its successive ripple effect upon the vast evolution of American and British music and culture.

With a plethora of books dedicated to the history of the guitar and the musicians who play it, you might ask yourself why we need another book on the subject. The author admits that this edition (limited to 300 signed and number copies) was written largely for collectors. It's an expensive book, and though well worth the read by any and all guitar lovers, the price will limit the audience. But before we discourage anyone from owning this precious publication, let's take a look at the book's contents and its impressive reverence for the art of bookmaking.

It is a beautifully produced work, to say the least. Every detail is executed with tremendous care: the ultra-fine, wood-free, archive-quality paper; the selection of a historically rare and beautiful font; and the hand typesetting. Then there are the original hand-tinted ink illustrations by Drew Christie, hand-assembled into each book and also included as frameable prints in a deluxe cloth-covered slipcase and accompanying slide-out tray.

The title is extracted from a quote by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow about a stellar performance in Boston by Madame Delores de Goni. Her virtuosity and implied endorsement of the first X-braced guitar made for her by C.F. Martin, Sr. helped to solidify Martin's reputation and promote the design that would come to define the modern guitar.

The 380-page book is divided into 31 chapters that offer an inspired and accurate chronological overview of the evolution of the guitar in America, with Stubbings re-tracing the footsteps of the instrument from New York to Pennsylvania, then down through North Carolina and Tennessee to New Orleans, and eventually California. Along the way, his travels connected him with many key players in the acoustic guitar world, including Matt Umanov (Umanov Guitars), Jim Bollman (The Music Emporium), the Jay family (Mandolin Bros.), George Gruhn (Gruhn Guitars), Eric Schoenberg (Schoenberg



COURTESY OF JOHN STUBBINGS

Guitars), Richard Hoover (Santa Cruz Guitar Co.), Andy Powers (Taylor Guitars), myself at C.F. Martin & Co., and too many more guitar makers, dealers, and musicians to mention. These sources all color Stubbings' experience with a rainbow of opinions that all point to one firm conclusion: "So much of the music we love today was inspired and facilitated by the acoustic guitar."

The Devil Is In It is available only from UK publisher Orpharion Press (orpharionpress.com). Its cost is a hefty £200 plus shipping from the UK, which works out to about \$260 (at the current exchange rate) plus approximately \$40

shipping to the U.S. (If the first edition sells out quickly, the author may investigate a paperback or eBook version.) I found it to be well worth the price of admission, as it's a very special keepsake and an engaging read with a unique point of view. In his quest to unravel the story of the acoustic guitar, John Stubbings has certainly discovered a great deal more.

Dick Boak was employed by C.F. Martin & Company from 1976 until his retirement in 2018. He initiated many Signature Edition guitar projects, managed Artist Relations, and extended Martin's Museum and Archives.

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Just a Closer Walk with Thee

Bob Dylan and Johnny Cash's reading of a traditional gospel song

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER



In February of 1969, Bob Dylan and Johnny Cash spent a couple of days in Nashville's Columbia Studio A, where they recorded informal versions of each other's songs, as well as traditional tunes by Jimmie Rodgers and others. Save for "Girl From the North Country," which appeared on Dylan's 1969 album, *Nashville Skyline*, nothing else from the sessions saw the light of day (unauthorized bootlegs notwithstanding) until the recent release of *Travelin' Thru, 1967-1969: The Bootleg Series Vol. 15* (reviewed on page 96).

From that three-disc set, "Just a Closer Walk with Thee" finds Dylan and Cash—incidentally, with rockabilly legend Carl Perkins on the electric guitar—putting a country spin on a New Orleans funeral standard. This arrangement depicts the vocal melody as sung by Cash. The song is quite straightforward, comprising two 16-bar verses (with an extra bar tacked onto the first verse) and a 16-bar chorus. Both sections are based on the same three-chord progression, containing the I, IV, and V (D, G, and A) in the key of A major.

The predominant accompaniment pattern in the first verse is based on a standard boom-chuck pattern—bass notes on beats 1 and 3 and chordal strums on 2 and 4, as shown below. If you listen closely to the main guitar in the second verse, you'll hear a cool variation: strumming, flanked by bluesy single-note riffing on the bottom strings. Use these patterns only as guidelines—the most important thing here is to go for a laid-back feel. **AG**

JUST A CLOSER WALK WITH THEE

TRADITIONAL

Verse 1 Accompaniment Pattern

Verse 2 Accompaniment Pattern

Chord diagrams for D (x00132) and A (001230) are shown above the musical notation.

The musical notation shows the accompaniment pattern for Verse 1 and Verse 2. Verse 1 consists of 16 bars, and Verse 2 consists of 16 bars. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. The bass line is indicated by numbers 0, 2, 3, and 0, representing frets on the bass strings.

etc. etc.

Verse

♩ = 100

Chord diagrams for D (x00132) and A (001230) are shown above the musical notation.

The musical notation shows the vocal melody for the verse. The lyrics are: 1. I am weak, but Thou are strong. 2. When my feeble life is o'er,

5 D
x00132

Je - sus for keep me from all wrong. more.

time for me will be no more.

9 G
210003

I'll be sat - is - fied as long as I walk,

Guide me gent - ly, safe - ly home to Thy king -

13 D
x00132 A
001230 D
x00132

let me walk close to Thee.

dom shore, to Thy shore.

Chorus

17 D
x00132 A
001230

Just a clos - er walk with Thee.

21 D
x00132

Grant it, Je - sus, if you please.

25 G
210003

Dear - ly walk - ing close to Thee. Let it

29 D
x00132 A
001230 D
x00132

be, dear Lord, let it be.

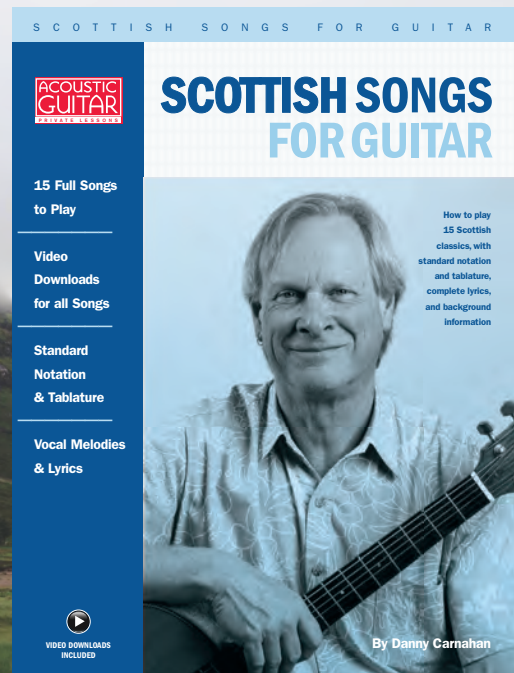
1.

2. *Fade out*

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Skytop Grand Concert

Yasmin Williams' custom guitar tells stories of the natural world

BY GREG OLWELL

The first guitar that luthier Eric Weigeshoff built for Yasmin Williams was destroyed when a cold snap froze and burst the pipes in his workshop, resulting in a rapid temperature drop that caused the instrument's soundboard to become cracked beyond repair. Unfortunate as that was, instead of making a new top, Weigeshoff and Williams decided to start over with a fresh set of unusual tonewoods.

Weigeshoff builds guitars under the brand Skytop in his New Paltz, New York, shop. His background in design and film informs the minimalist look of his guitars, which he builds with side ports in place of conventional soundholes. He uses traditional tonewoods but turns to less common species and multi-scale fretboards when customers want something even less ordinary.

This multi-scale Skytop Grand Concert guitar is the one that now belongs to Williams, a guitarist whose idiosyncratic instrumentals

often incorporate two-handed tapping, played in lap-steel position, along with percussive effects. (See the May/June 2019 issue of *AG* for a transcription of Williams' composition "New Beginnings," which finds the guitarist in a more conventional mode.) While Williams might invite some comparison to Michael Hedges, her music—and how she creates it—is uniquely her own, so it's not surprising that she would be drawn to Weigeshoff's guitars.

For her Skytop, Williams chose a tonewood set that happens to demonstrate how other forms of life can transform wood. The guitar's Sitka spruce soundboard is pocked with holes that are cross-sections of tunnels bored into the

spruce by Teredo clams (aka shipworms). Long before being milled into guitar tops, the logs were used to surround rafts towed around Puget Sound, in the Pacific Northwest. Teredo worms had chewed meandering tunnels through each log, leaving unique patterns that can be seen in the top of Williams' guitar.

For the back and sides, Williams opted for tamarind, a tropical hardwood, with elaborate spalting (the result of fungus staining the wood into a dramatic figure) and contrasting sapwood on the back. The Skytop GC came together thanks to a mollusk, fungus, a guitar maker, a musician, and some wood uniting to create a guitar with a powerful sonic—and visual—punch. **AG**



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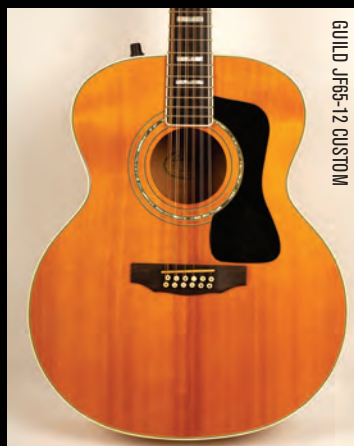
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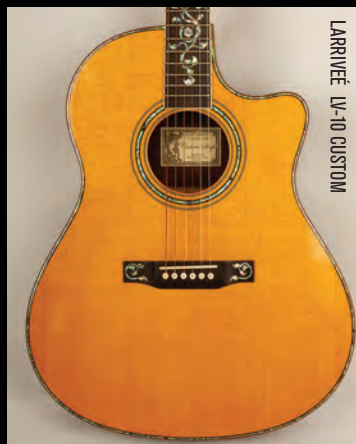
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